

THE NEGRO IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS SINCE
RECONSTRUCTION

by

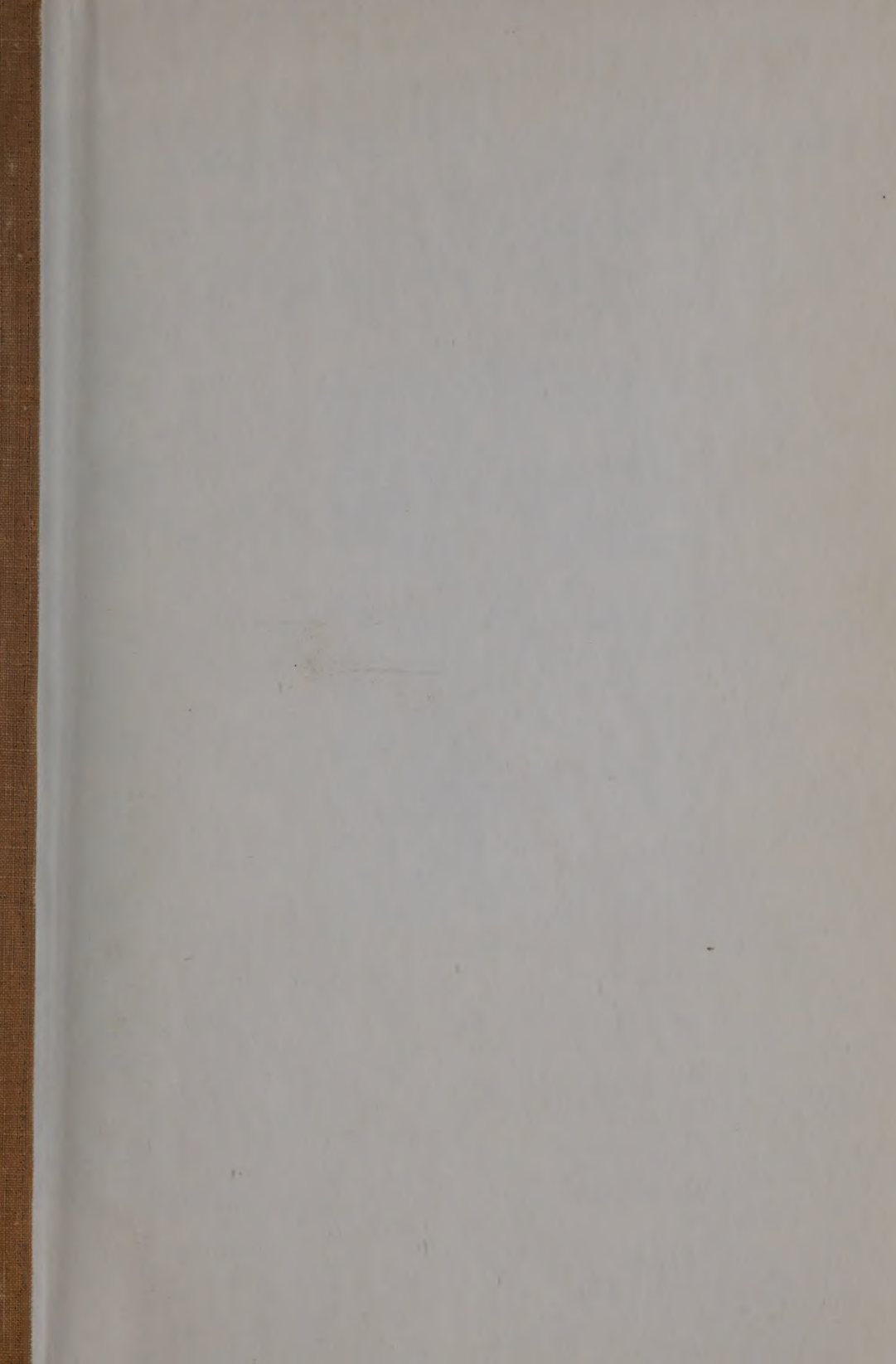
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POLITICS SINCE RECONSTRUCTION

BY

WILLIAM ALEXANDER MABRY



DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
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BY

WILLIAM ALEXANDER MABRY

*Associate Professor of History
Mount Union College*



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INTRODUCTION

The coming of twenty Negroes aboard a Dutch man-of-war to Jamestown in 1619 marked the beginning not only of American Negro slavery but of the complicated problem of race relations which has outlived slavery. One significant aspect of this larger problem has been that of the Negro in politics. As long as slavery lasted the Negroes were subject without question to the political rule of the white man. When slavery ended as a result of the Civil War, the victorious North gave to the Negroes, first, full civil rights and, a short time thereafter, free exercise of the ballot. Would the South remain under these circumstances a "white man's country" or would political power be shared by the two races in proportion to numbers? That is a question which has not been finally answered, but thus far the old master class has managed, in the main, to keep the upper hand, and to write most of the rules of the game.

North Carolina is one stage on which this drama of race relations has been enacted. The whites have always outnumbered the Negroes in a ratio, roughly, of two to one. At no time has there been a likelihood of actual Negro domination of the state in the sense of controlling the highest offices. But at times Negroes have held the balance of power and, actively or passively, have exerted a powerful influence on the political life of the state.

The role of the Negro in North Carolina politics has not been a glorious one. He was enfranchised largely for the aggrandizement of one political party and virtually disfranchised to serve the interests of another. Throughout, he has been somewhat a victim of circumstances. If, as has often been charged, he has cut a sorry figure in politics, the record of the white man is by no means without blemish. Many a political crime has been committed in the name of "White Supremacy."

The story of the Negro in North Carolina politics must tell, therefore, not only of the political activities of the Negroes themselves but of the whites as well in so far as they have been affected by the Negro issue. Had there been no Negro voters there would have been no "Grandfather Clause," no poll tax and literacy prerequisites for voting, and, perhaps, no "Solid South." In its handling of the problem of Negro suffrage, North Carolina has not been unique. Its experiences have been, with few variations, the experiences of the South generally. Such are the themes of this study.

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THE NEGRO IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS
SINCE RECONSTRUCTION

CHAPTER I

FREE NEGRO VOTERS AND RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION

The Negro did not play a significant role in ante-bellum North Carolina politics. In a land of slavery the servile class would obviously have no part in the conduct of government. Free Negroes, of whom North Carolina had some thirty thousand in 1860, were permitted to retain the privilege of voting until 1835. But there is little reason to believe that they voted in sufficient numbers to exert much influence on the outcome of elections.

Fragmentary bits of evidence testify to the fact that Negroes occasionally voted during the Colonial period. The Queen was informed, for example, that when a new General Assembly was chosen for the Province of Carolina in 1703, "the election was managed with very great partiality and injustice, all sorts of people, even servants, Negroes, aliens, Jews, and common sailors were permitted to vote"¹ Apparently Negro voting was regarded with disfavor in the colony, for the General Assembly enacted a statute in 1715 which provided that "no Negro, Mulatto or Indians shall be capable of voting for Members of Assembly." Though this law was disallowed by the Crown in 1737,² Negroes were not active politically in North Carolina before the Revolution. Only "freeholders" who owned fifty acres of land could vote, and this qualification undoubtedly discouraged free Negroes who might otherwise have been politically inclined.³

The first North Carolina State Constitution, framed at Halifax during November and December, 1876, showed some evidence of the revolutionary spirit of the times. Though in most respects it was a relatively conservative document, it provided for a widening of the suffrage. All "freemen" of legal age who paid taxes were given the right to vote for members of the House of Commons; ownership of fifty acres of land was required in order to vote for members of the Senate.⁴ Thus, technically, free Negroes were

¹ *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, ed. William L. Saunders (Raleigh, 1886), I, 639.

² *Ibid.*, II, 215; IV, 251.

³ R. H. Taylor, *The Free Negro in North Carolina (The James Sprunt Historical Publications, Vol. XVII, No. 1, Chapel Hill, N. C., 1920)*, p. 13.

⁴ *The State Records of North Carolina*, ed. Walter Clark (Goldsboro, N. C., 1886-1907), XXIII, 981.

"freemen" and entitled to the ballot on equal terms with the whites. Whether the framers of the Constitution intended this interpretation is not clear. Several prominent members of the Constitutional Convention of 1835 expressed doubts that free Negroes were regarded as citizens in 1776.⁵ However, the fact remains that free Negroes did vote more or less regularly until 1835.

The number of free Negro voters naturally varied with time and locality. In 1835 it was reported that there were three hundred colored voters in Halifax County, one hundred and fifty in Hertford, fifty in Chowan, and seventy-five in Pasquotank.⁶ Other eastern counties probably had proportionate numbers. In the West, on the other hand, there were fewer Negroes and correspondingly fewer colored voters. Samuel King, of Iredell County, stated in the course of debate in the Constitutional Convention of 1835, that he could not remember a Negro's ever having voted in his county.⁷

Free Negro voting was not regarded as a problem of great magnitude. Yet when a constitutional convention was called to meet in 1835 for the primary purpose of dealing with the insistent demands of the western counties for greater representation in the legislature it was empowered to decide the future political status of the free Negroes.⁸ There had been complaints from certain eastern and middle counties that the majority of colored voters were ignorant, easily influenced, and had little real interest in the government. In Granville County it was reported that the Negroes had persistently voted for Robert Potter, a fluent speaker but unprincipled politician, who did not have the favor of the better class of whites.⁹ Sometimes Negro support was more of a liability than an asset to a candidate. In any case, the Negroes were apt to be amenable to bribery. A contemporary observer noted that with a little money or liquor they could be bought "like a lot of poultry."¹⁰

It must be borne in mind, also, that about 1830 the South was coming more and more to defend the institution of slavery and to restrict the privileges of free Negroes. This tendency was undoubt-

⁵ North Carolina Constitutional Convention, 1835, *Proceedings and Debates* (Raleigh, 1836), pp. 66-68.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁸ Henry Groves Connor, *The Convention of 1835* (North Carolina Booklet, Vol. VIII, No. 2, Raleigh, 1908), p. 95.

⁹ "David Dodge" [O. W. Blackwell], "The Free Negro in North Carolina," *Atlantic Monthly*, LVII, 25 (Jan., 1886).

¹⁰ North Carolina Constitutional Convention, 1835, *Proceedings and Debates*, p. 77.

edly accentuated by the Southampton Insurrection in Virginia in 1831. In 1835 there existed in North Carolina the strange anomaly of a class of people—free Negroes—who were forbidden to return to the state after an absence of ninety days, deemed incompetent to testify against a white person in court, and generally hedged about with civil restrictions, but who retained the highest of political privileges—the right to vote.

Yet, the free Negro was not without his champions in the Constitutional Convention of 1835. Emanuel Shober, of Stokes County, in opening the debate on disfranchisement, asserted: "They [free Negroes] ought to be considered as a class of persons standing between the whites and the slave population; and in proportion as we raise them above the slaves, by allowing them certain privileges, they will become our safeguard from any evil designs from the slaves; but if by neglect, we force the free Negroes into the ranks of the slaves, we can expect no friendly aid from them." Shober favored allowing those who owned one hundred dollars worth of property to continue to vote.¹¹ Similarly, William Gaston, of Craven County, was opposed to depriving the free Negroes of a privilege which they had customarily enjoyed. "Let them know they are a part of the body politic, and they will feel an attachment to the form of government," he said.¹²

But the majority of delegates, especially those from the East, felt otherwise. In language strikingly similar to that of the "White Supremacists" of the late 1890's, these opponents of free-Negro suffrage assailed a continuation of the privilege which had been exercised since the Revolution. The words of Hugh McQueen, of Chatham County, are illustrative of the point of view of this group: "Now, Sir, I do insist that there is a broad partition line between the fitness of free Negroes to exercise the right of suffrage, and free white persons. The Negro came to this country in a state of slavery, with no expectation of sharing in the distribution of its political privileges, and with no expectation on the part of others that he would share in them. He came here debased; he is yet debased, and there is no sort of polish which education or circumstance can give him which ever will reconcile the whites to an extension of the rights of suffrage to the free Negro. Unless we adapt our laws to the public feelings of the country, they will forever constitute an offense to the people."¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The proposition to abrogate *in toto* the right of free persons of color to vote was carried in the Convention by a scant majority of five votes, the final count being sixty-six for and sixty-one against.¹⁴ Of the sixty-six votes for disfranchisement, forty-eight were cast by Easterners. Thus it was primarily the East, the greatest slaveholding section of the state, that effected the withdrawal of the ballot from the free Negroes. In many respects, the new constitution reflected the wishes of the West; this was one concession wrung by the East.

Slaveholders had disfranchised the Negroes; slaveholders were to keep them disfranchised as long as their influence remained paramount in the state. But the Southern attempt to perpetuate its agrarian economy based on slaveholding went down to defeat in the smoke of battle. The death of the Confederacy at Appomattox meant, in a very real sense, the death of the old order in the South. The Thirteenth Amendment, proclaimed in force in December, 1865, clarified and extended the terms of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of some three years earlier. Everywhere the slaves were free.

Freedom from bondage, however, did not mean elevation to political power. Emancipation was not enfranchisement. The white South had no serious thought in 1865 of conceding to the Negroes social or political equality. The Negro was a free man; he was entitled to certain civil rights; and he should be given an opportunity to make a living. But he was still of an inferior race; he always would be. That was the prevailing Southern viewpoint, and North Carolina shared it.

The presidential plan of reconstruction, as elaborated and applied by both Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, was not based on the idea of Negro suffrage. Disfranchisement of certain classes of ex-Confederate leaders was provided for, but otherwise, under the so-called "ten-percent plan," the states were to be left free to prescribe their own suffrage qualifications. Lincoln did not believe in absolute equality of the white and black races, nor did he advocate immediate or general enfranchisement of the ex-slaves. The nearest he came to supporting the principle of Negro suffrage was his suggestion to Provisional Governor Hahn of Louisiana in March, 1864, that some of the colored people be permitted to vote, "as for instance

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 81.

the very intelligent and especially those who fought so gallantly in our ranks."¹⁵

But fate did not decree that Lincoln should write the last word on the subject of Reconstruction. His career came to a violent and tragic end in mid-April, 1865. Even before Lincoln's death at the hands of John Wilkes Booth, his plan of Reconstruction was being blocked by a recalcitrant Congress, which refused to seat the Senators and Representatives from states reorganized by the President.

Andrew Johnson, a North Carolina "poor white" by birth, was now President, and of his aid the Radical Republicans in Congress were distinctly hopeful. After a brief veering toward the Radical position, however, Johnson accepted the main tenets of Lincoln's plan. "It would not do to let the Negro have universal suffrage now; it would breed a war of races," said Johnson in October, 1865.¹⁶

Meanwhile, President Johnson had taken definite steps to effect the political reconstruction of North Carolina and the other ex-Confederate states. On May 29, 1865, he issued a general Amnesty Proclamation and ordered the restoration of civil government in North Carolina under the authority of the United States, naming William W. Holden, Unionist editor of the *Raleigh Standard*, as provisional governor.¹⁷ Fourteen classes of Southern whites, principally civil and military leaders of the Confederacy, were excluded from the electorate by the presidential proclamation. But numbers of those debarred were able to secure executive pardon, and the Negroes were not enfranchised. The leadership in North Carolina was changing, but the "bottom rail" was not yet on top.

On the call of Governor Holden, an election was held for delegates to a state convention which met in Raleigh on October 2, 1865. The Ordinance of Secession was promptly repealed, and slavery prohibited in the state. The General Assembly met on November 27, and ratified the Thirteenth Amendment. The provisional government came to an end on December 23, when William W. Holden was succeeded by Jonathan Worth, who had been chosen by popular election in November. North Carolina had been "reconstructed" under the presidential plan.¹⁸

¹⁵ Edward McPherson (ed.), *Political History of Reconstruction* (Washington, 1880), p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁷ James D. Richardson (ed.), *Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (Washington, 1898), VI, 312-314.

¹⁸ J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (Colum-

But the end was not yet. A first-rate controversy over prerogative was developing between the President and Congress: Senators and Representatives from the "reconstructed" states were not permitted to assume their seats. Furthermore, the Radical Republican majority in Congress, prompted by a combination of motives—political expediency and humanitarian considerations for the Negro—began to evolve a distinctly different plan of reconstruction for the conquered South. The Negro must be given full civil rights and, if he was to be counted in the apportionment of Congressional representation, full political rights as well. Over President Johnson's veto, Congress passed the Civil Rights Bill and Fourteenth Amendment. North Carolina, along with the majority of the other Southern states, refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, since it provided, among other things, for a reduction by about one third of the state's representatives in Congress unless the Negro was accorded the right to vote. The temper of the Radicals was thoroughly aroused by the end of 1866, and a showdown on Reconstruction was not far off.

Meanwhile the Negroes of North Carolina were not entirely oblivious to the possibility of being admitted to the electorate. Sidney Andrews, a Northern newspaper correspondent, questioned a Negro barber of Wilmington on this point and received the following reply: "To be sure, sah, we wants to vote, but, sah, de great matter is to git into de witness box."¹⁹ In September, 1865, a state-wide meeting of Negroes was held in Raleigh for the purpose of agitating for equal rights. J. W. Hood, a colored minister from Connecticut, and James H. Harris, a North Carolina Negro who had been educated in Ohio, assumed leading roles in the assemblage. Likewise prominent in the session were A. H. Galloway and Isham Sweat, natives of the state. Though a demand for equal rights, including suffrage, was considered, the resolutions adopted simply called for educational opportunities and abolition of discriminations against Negroes before the law.²⁰ North Carolina Negroes were not in position to force the suffrage issue in 1865. The pressure was to come later and from the outside.

The autumn elections of 1866 perceptibly strengthened the

hia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. LVIII, No. 141, New York, 1914), pp. 117-140.

¹⁹ Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Boston, 1866), p. 189.

²⁰ Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, p. 149.

hands of the Radicals in Congress. Reinforced by newly chosen Senators and Representatives, they proceeded in the spring of 1867 to write their own plan of reconstruction over the repeated vetoes of the President. The Reconstruction Acts of Congress provided for the organization of ten ex-Confederate states into five military districts, each to be under the command of a general of the United States Army. In due time, elections of delegates to constitutional conventions in the several states were to be held. The electorate was to consist of all "loyal" citizens, including the ex-slaves; disfranchised were all persons who had held civil or military office before the war and who had then supported the Confederacy.²¹ Thus the erst-while leaders in the Southern States were counted out, and the Negroes were counted in. Said Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania on the floor of the United States House of Representatives: "I am for Negro suffrage in every rebel state . . . if it be a punishment to traitors, they deserve it."²²

The process of Reconstruction in North Carolina went rapidly forward. North Carolina together with South Carolina comprised the Second Military District, and, in November, 1867, General Edward R. S. Canby ordered an election of delegates to a convention which was to frame a new constitution for the former state. Negroes were permitted to register as voters for the first time since 1835, and nearly seventy-three thousand availed themselves of their new privilege. True enough, the white registration exceeded that of the Negroes by some thirty-four thousand, but nineteen eastern counties had Negro majorities.²³

The launching of the Republican party in North Carolina practically coincided in point of time with the enfranchisement of the Negroes. A meeting for that purpose was held in Raleigh on March 27, 1867, and was presided over by William W. Holden. Negroes actively participated in the organization from the first. Proceedings were opened by a colored minister, and the president was escorted to the chair by a white delegate and a colored delegate. Representatives of both races spoke, the white speakers vying with the Negroes in expressing satisfaction at the admission of the ex-

²¹ For the text of the Reconstruction Acts see *United States Statutes at Large*, XIV, 428, 429; XV, 2-4; XV, 14-16; XV, 41. Tennessee, having ratified promptly the Fourteenth Amendment, was restored to representation in Congress, July 24, 1866, and was, therefore, not subject to military rule.

²² *Congressional Globe* (39th Congress, 2d Session, Pt. 1), p. 252.

²³ Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, p. 236.

slaves to the electorate.²⁴ The task of regimenting the Negroes in the Republican ranks was assumed by the secret political societies, the Heroes of America and the Union League. The latter appealed particularly to the Negroes and became in time almost exclusively a Negro order in the state. Not only did the Union League instruct the Negroes in the principles of the Republican party and dictate the candidates for which they were to vote, but the organization was sometimes guilty of inciting the blacks to commit acts of violence against the whites.²⁵

There was little incentive for the old ruling class to combat the rising tide of Republicanism in the state, backed as it was by the power of Congress and Federal bayonets. Numbers of whites were disfranchised; many more refrained from political activity because it seemed so futile. A few, calling themselves Conservatives, entered the fray in the hope of exerting a moderating influence.

The "Canby Constitutional Convention" met in Raleigh on January 14, 1868, with Republican dominance virtually uncontested. Only thirteen members were Conservatives. Of the one hundred and seven Republicans, eighteen were carpetbaggers and fifteen were Negroes. Prominent among the latter group were James H. Harris, J. W. Hood, and A. H. Galloway. The constitution which was framed in 1868 was considerably more democratic than the one it replaced and in many ways was a sound document. But the members of the Convention exhibited little originality; they copied freely from the constitution of Ohio and those of certain other Northern states.²⁶

The most controversial article was that which enfranchised the Negroes. Yet on this point there could be no real doubt as to the outcome, for the granting of suffrage to the Negroes had already been made a *sine qua non* of the state's readmission to the Union. The Republican majority in the Convention began its justification of Negro suffrage with this point: "This change was inevitable. Without it there could be no return to the Union, no escape from the hopeless ruin which is inseparable from a continuance in our present unnatural condition. But apart from this convincing reason, reflecting men must see that a prudent regard for the welfare of both races and for the peace and harmony of society required the exten-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

²⁵ Hugh Talmage Lefler (ed.), *North Carolina History Told by Contemporaries* (Chapel Hill, 1934), pp. 319-321.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

sion of the great privilege of voting to the colored people, and just men must admit that all who are expected to bear their share of the manifold burden of the government at all times and to expose their lives for its defense in war, should be allowed a full participation in its direction."²⁷

A minority report of the committee on suffrage signed by two Conservatives—John W. Graham and Plato Durham—vigorously dissented from this justification of Negro suffrage, and it is safe to assume that their words reflected the sentiment of the majority of native whites in the state: "We cannot view, without serious apprehension, the admission to all the highest rights and privileges of citizenship of a race, consisting almost entirely of those recently emerged from slavery and unfitted by previous education and habits of thought and self-reliance, for the intelligent discharge of the duties and responsibilities, which would devolve upon them. . . . While we do not deny that there are individuals of that class who might be expected to express their own convictions at the ballot-box, still the great mass of them are so ignorant and prejudiced that they easily become the dupes of designing adventurers and demagogues. . . ."²⁸

The fears of the Conservatives were not without foundation, but the process of Radical Reconstruction could not be checked. The newly framed constitution, including the universal manhood suffrage clause, was ratified by popular vote in April, 1868, the count being 93,084 for and 74,015 against. At the same election, William W. Holden, Republican, was chosen governor. The Constitution of 1868 was soon approved by Congress, and North Carolina's senators and representatives, all Republican save one, took their places in Washington. The new legislature met in Raleigh on July 1, and on the following day ratified the Fourteenth Amendment. General Canby forthwith declared military rule at an end in North Carolina. Civil government was restored, with the carpetbaggers, scalawags, and their Negro allies in the saddle.²⁹

A detailed analysis of the Republican rule in North Carolina during Reconstruction is not within the scope of this study. Though not as open to condemnation as that in certain other Southern states, the record was by no means one of efficiency and highminded states-

²⁷ North Carolina Constitutional Convention, 1868, *Journal* (Raleigh, 1868), p. 484.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 235, 236.

²⁹ Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, pp. 268-292.

manship. An authority on the subject has summed it up thus: "The two leading characteristics of the administration of public affairs during the Republican regime were extravagance, combined with corruption and incompetence."⁸⁰

✓ The question may well be raised at this point as to the extent of Negro rule in North Carolina during Reconstruction and also as to the responsibility of the Negroes for such governmental ills as existed. Thinking in terms of the state as a whole, there was no Negro rule in the strictest sense. At no time did the number of Negro voters equal the number of white voters, nor did Negroes fill the highest elective offices in the state. In the election held in November, 1867, on the proposition of calling a constitutional convention, for instance, there were 72,932 registered Negro voters and 106,721 white voters.⁸¹ And the percentage of Negro voters in this election was considerably higher than normal.

In each of the sessions of the General Assembly during Reconstruction and for a time thereafter there were numbers of Negroes, but never were they in the majority, as was the case in South Carolina. In the legislature which met in July, 1868, three of the fifty senators were Negroes as were sixteen of the one hundred and twenty members of the House of Representatives. Most of these Negroes were illiterate and easily corruptible.⁸² But the same might be said of many of the whites. W. E. Burghardt DuBois, militant spokesman of the Negro race, goes so far as to say that "The Reconstruction problem in North Carolina, while it had to deal with ignorance and inefficiency, was only to a very small extent a Negro problem."⁸³

There is a measure of truth in this assertion, but considering the question from another angle, it appears to be only a half-truth. For without the support of the large block of Negro votes the carpet-baggers and scalawags who doubled the state debt and looted the public treasury could scarcely have maintained their control of the government. Also, in the "Black Belt" counties of the East the Negroes were in the majority, and hundreds of Negroes held county and city offices. In most cases these Negro constables, registers of

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁸¹ North Carolina Constitutional Convention, 1868, *Journal*, p. 118.

⁸² Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, p. 350.

⁸³ W. E. Burghardt DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York, 1935), p. 531.

deeds, aldermen, and the like were woefully lacking in ability and training for the positions they held.

Another unfortunate, yet apparently inevitable, result of the sudden enfranchisement of the mass of ex-slaves was the accentuation of friction between the races. That the old ruling class in general resented seeing Negroes at the polls and having to deal with them as public officials is undoubtedly true.³⁴ The poor whites, even more than the former slaveholders, were enraged by the political activity of the Negroes, since this seemed but another evidence of the Negro's bid for equality. Had there been no Union League, there would probably have been no Ku-Klux Klan and no "Kirk-Holden War" in North Carolina.

But, again, in fairness to the Negro, it must be said that he was not responsible for his own enfranchisement, and his leaders during the turbulent period of Reconstruction were mostly white men—some of them native sons of North Carolina. Political opportunism is no respecter of race.

³⁴ Alfred Moore Waddell, *Some Memories of My Life* (Raleigh, 1908), p. 101.

CHAPTER II

THE RULE OF THE "BOURBONS," 1876-1894

Radical Reconstruction spent its force more quickly in North Carolina than in most of the Southern States. The first stage in the recovery of "home rule" came in 1870, when the Republicans lost control of both houses of the legislature to the Conservatives. This "Reform Legislature" proceeded to impeach Governor Holden, but otherwise did not make any fundamental changes in the governmental structure. Moreover, the Republicans continued to be strong enough to elect their gubernatorial candidates until 1876. The Negro vote was still important and was cast almost solidly Republican.

Meanwhile, forces were already at work looking toward the creation of a solid "white man's party" in the state. Since it was the Republican party which enfranchised the Negro and then profited by his support, it was altogether natural that the Conservative party (known as the Democratic party after 1871) should introduce the race issue into politics. The brief period of Radical Reconstruction, with its attendant Negro office-holding, had served to fuse formerly divergent white elements into a strong opposition party to the Republicans, who had come to be regarded in the state as essentially a "Negro party."¹

If the Republicans had been guilty of lowering the political morality of the state, the Democrats "fought fire with fire." Chicanery, fraud, and intimidation became the order of the day. A fellow Republican wrote to Daniel L. Russell, then a candidate for a superior court judgeship, in June, 1874, as follows: "I would be very proud if you would get some good speakers to come up from Wilmington . . . and stir up the colored men in these three townships [Taylor's Bridge, Turkey, and Clinton]. One or two days before the election will be the best time, then the Democrats will not have long to cheat and buy, scare and bambozle [*sic*] them. If we could keep them from fooling the darkies in those three townships we could make a great gain. . . . The Democrats have the

¹ Stephen B. Weeks, *A History of Negro Suffrage in the South* (Boston, 1894), p. 690. Reprinted from *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 4.

advantage of us in speakers, also in money, for we are somewhat poor."²

By 1874, the Democratic strength in the legislature was sufficient to secure the passage of a bill calling for a constitutional convention to be held the following year. In the campaign for members which followed the call, the Republicans waged a bitter fight to secure a majority which would be pledged to adjourn the convention *sine die*. The Republican newspapers asserted, among other things, that if the Democrats controlled the convention they would levy a tax to compensate the former masters for the loss of their slaves.³ Page, a Negro candidate in Chowan County, during the course of one of his speeches said, "If we get control of that Convention we will give the white folks H—l, d—n 'em. No distinction of color shall be known in anything."⁴

The Democratic press parried the thrusts of the opposition with appeals to race feeling. Just before the election, the *Charlotte Democrat* raised the cry of "White Supremacy," which was to be heard in the state so many times before the close of the century: "White men of North Carolina, are you ready for mixed schools, for Negro judges, for Negro representatives, for Negro Senators? Are you ready to forget that . . . this is a white man's government, framed by wisdom of the white man, and secured by the blood of the white race? If you are ready for such tremendous changes, stay away from the polls on the day of election. If you are not ready for all these, come up, every man of you, and vote for the man of your race."⁵

The election was extremely close and resulted in the selection of fifty-eight regular Democrats, fifty-eight Republicans, and three Independents as members of the Convention. Two days after the opening session on September 6, 1875, the Republicans sought to adjourn the Convention *sine die*, as they had promised during the campaign, but the Democrats, with the aid of the Independents, frustrated this attempt.⁶

² Col. Cotton Sessoms to Daniel L. Russell, June 2, 1874 (Daniel L. Russell Papers, University of North Carolina Library).

³ Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, p. 632.

⁴ (Raleigh) *Sentinel*, July 27, 1875. Quoted in Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, p. 633.

⁵ *Charlotte Democrat*, Aug. 2, 1875. Quoted in Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, pp. 633, 634.

⁶ North Carolina Constitutional Convention, 1875, *Journal* (Raleigh, 1875), p. 27.

In spite of its Democratic-Independent majority, the Convention was not in a position to disfranchise the Negroes as a group. The state Constitution of 1868 had extended the suffrage to the Negro, and the act admitting North Carolina to representation in Congress, on June 25, 1868, specified that the state Constitution should not "be so amended or changed as to deprive any citizen or class of citizens of the United States of the right to vote in said State, who are entitled to vote by the constitution thereof herein recognized. . . ."⁷ Furthermore, the Fifteenth Amendment, proclaimed in force, March 30, 1870, declared that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."⁸

Though respecting the letter of the constitutional and statutory limitations, the Convention of 1875 was able to take steps which affected the status of the Negro in politics. Section 25 of the new Bill of Rights asserted that "secret political societies are dangerous to the liberties of a free people and should not be tolerated." The state had had enough of the Union League and its control over Negro voters. Under the head of the Judicial Department, Article IV, Section 30, authorized the General Assembly to elect and control the justices of the peace. The most important changes affecting "Suffrage and Eligibility to Office" were those in Article VI, Section I, which increased the required period of residence in the county from sixty to ninety days, and which debarred all persons from voting who had been convicted of a felony or infamous crime. Quite important was the power conferred by Article VII on the General Assembly to prescribe the form of county or city governments.⁹

Only a brief analysis of these constitutional changes is needed to show how effectively they might be used by the dominant party to disfranchise considerable numbers of Negroes and to render less effective those votes actually cast by the Negroes. The articles requiring ninety instead of sixty days' residence in a county before voting and debarring persons convicted of a felony or infamous crime from voting were discriminations not against the Negro directly but against certain assumed characteristics of his race. Negroes

⁷ Text of the Act in *United States Statutes at Large*, XV, 73-74.

⁸ *United States Revised Statutes* (Washington, 1878), p. 32.

⁹ *Amendments to the Constitution of North Carolina, Proposed by the Constitutional Convention of 1875 . . .* Prepared by Johnstone Jones and John Reilly (Raleigh, 1875), pp. 1, 19, 21, 22.

were then prone to move about frequently; hence the longer residence requirement was calculated to disfranchise a larger percentage of Negroes than whites. The denial of the franchise to those persons guilty of a felony was based on the same principle. Stealing, for example, was by no means limited to members of the Negro race, yet the crime was rather common among them. Furthermore, white registrars could be counted on to charge, if the need arose, that certain Negroes seeking to register had been guilty of a crime and hence were ineligible to vote.

[The election of 1876 marked the complete downfall of Republican power in the state.] But the campaign preceding it was a closely contested one, filled with the race issue. Certain eastern counties already had Negro officials, and still more were running for office. [The majority of the commissioners in Jones County were Negroes; a Negro was superintendent of the Bertie County home. The Halifax County Board of Commissioners was completely controlled by Negroes.] The "Black" counties generally were suffering from high taxes and bad government.¹⁰ Against these conditions the Democrats launched a vigorous attack. Their standard-bearer was Zebulon B. Vance, North Carolina's "war governor," of whom one of his contemporaries asserted: "As a popular orator and debater there has been in North Carolina no man who approached him."¹¹ Vance toured the state, frequently meeting in joint debate his Republican opponent for the governorship, Judge Thomas Settle. No opportunity was missed to chide Settle because of his Negro supporters. In the election, the Democrats won a complete victory. Vance's majority was more than thirteen thousand, all the constitutional amendments were ratified, and the new legislature was preponderantly Democratic.¹² The conservative Democrats, or "Bourbons" as they were often called, were at last in undisputed power and were so to remain for nearly a quarter of a century.

White supremacy was secure for the state as a whole, but the same could not be said of the twenty-two "Black" counties.¹³ It

¹⁰ Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, p. 648.

¹¹ J. P. Caldwell, quoted in Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, pp. 649-650.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 649-654.

¹³ Counties in which Negroes numbered 50 per cent or more of the total population in 1880 were: Anson, Bertie, Bladen, Caswell, Chowan, Craven, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Greene, Halifax, Hertford, Jones, Lenoir, New Hanover, Northampton, Pasquotank, Pender, Pitt, Richmond, Robeson, and Warren (United States Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915*, Washington, 1918, pp. 784, 785).

was with this problem that the legislature of 1876-1877 was called upon to grapple. The solution was relatively simple. So long as the great majority of whites stuck together, Democratic control of the legislature was assured. Why not, then, revert to the system which had prevailed in North Carolina prior to 1868—that of having the legislature appoint the principal county officers? Accordingly, the legislature of 1876-1877, under the authority delegated to it by the Constitution of 1875, passed a county government law which provided that the legislature should name the justices of the peace. The justices of the peace, in turn, were to elect from three to five persons from their respective counties to act as a board of county commissioners.¹⁴ The principal county officers were thus to be chosen by appointment rather than by popular vote in the county.

The legislature also took steps to alleviate conditions in the towns of eastern North Carolina which had Negro majorities and hence had numerous Negro officials. In Wilmington, for example, the colored voting population outnumbered the white by about fourteen hundred. Already in 1875 the legislature had sought to counteract this heavy Negro vote by amending the city charter of Wilmington. The residence requirement for voting was raised from thirty to ninety days, and the government of the city was placed in the hands of a board of aldermen of nine members, three to be elected from each of three wards. Then the city was so gerrymandered that the whites had a majority in two wards and, hence, were entitled to elect six of the aldermen, in spite of the fact that the single "Black" ward had more than three times as many voters as the other two wards combined.¹⁵

This raising of the residence requirement was declared to be unconstitutional by the State Supreme Court on the ground that the General Assembly could not fix higher residence qualifications for voting in a single city than prevailed in the State at large.¹⁶ But the court decision had little practical effect, since the Convention of 1875 so amended the Constitution as to give the legislature almost unlimited power over municipal corporations.¹⁷

Turning its attention again to the Wilmington situation, the legislature in 1877 empowered the governor to appoint five "dis-

¹⁴ *Public Laws of North Carolina, 1876-1877* (Raleigh, 1877), chap. xli, p. 227.

¹⁵ *Van Bokkelen vs. Canady* (North Carolina Supreme Court Reports, LXXIII, 198).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Constitution of North Carolina (1875), art. vii, sec. 14.

creet and proper persons among the electors of the city of Wilmington" to act as a Board of Audit and Finance. The duties of this board were to be of a supervisory nature; it was to pass upon all claims against the city, all tax levies, salaries, compensations, etc.¹⁸ Obviously, the "discreet and proper persons" named by the governor would be white.

This system of legislative control over county and municipal governments violated the principle of local self-government and occasioned considerable opposition in the western counties, where there was no danger of Negro rule. However, the legislature deemed it necessary to work a hardship, if hardship it was, on the western counties in order to insure white control in "Black" counties of the East.

(Gerrymandering was used not only to accomplish local objectives, but on a larger scale wherever possible to serve the interests of the dominant party and, incidentally, the cause of "White Supremacy." The legislature of 1872, controlled by the Democrats, drew up a bill dividing the state into forty senatorial districts. Twenty districts with twenty-three state senators had seventy-five thousand more inhabitants than the other twenty districts with twenty-seven senators.¹⁹ Said the *Carolina Era* by way of criticism: "No regard is paid to compactness and contiguity of territory, when the constitution requires that regard shall be had thereto as far as may be. Counties are grouped together in utter violation of these constitutional rules, for the purpose of enabling the Democrats to elect a much larger number of senators than their fair proportion, according to the respective number of voters in each party."²⁰ Though this particular bill which was under fire was altered somewhat before passage, its essential outline and net effect remained unchanged.

In arranging Congressional districts, counties which were regarded as hopelessly Republican and which were contiguous or nearly contiguous were included in one district, and this district was then tacitly surrendered to the Republicans. Such was North Carolina's Second Congressional District—the "Black Second." By action of the legislature of 1876-1877, this district was comprised of

¹⁸ *Public Laws of North Carolina (1877)*, chap. cxliii, p. 230.

¹⁹ Stanton P. Williams, *The Problem of Redistricting in North Carolina* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Duke University, 1934), pp. 162-163.

²⁰ *Carolina Era* (Raleigh), Feb. 8, 1872. Quoted in Williams, *The Problem of Redistricting in North Carolina*, p. 163.

eight Republican and two Democratic counties. It ran in an irregular line some one hundred and seventy-five miles south-eastwardly from the Virginia border to Pamlico Sound.²¹ The other seven Congressional districts of North Carolina were so arranged as to give Democratic majorities.

By altering the election law, the Democratic majority in the legislature of 1876-1877 still further fortified their dominant position in the state government. Such changes as were made, on the face of them, were not obviously discriminatory against the opposition party—certainly not against the Negroes as a race. Yet it is reasonably clear that the general purpose of the changes was to make voting more difficult and to give greater discretionary powers to the registrars and judges of election. Registration books were to be opened two working days before the day of election, and any name registered might be challenged by any elector. Little time was thus allowed for the proving of one's qualifications. Furthermore, the law authorized the registrar, upon the request of any elector, to require the applicant for registration to prove his identity, age, and residence by the testimony of at least one other elector, under oath.²² Negroes frequently had difficulty getting supporting testimony. Even if such evidence was presented, the election officials still had discretionary powers. The law on this point read: ". . . after such oath shall have been taken, the judges may, nevertheless, refuse to permit such person to vote if they be satisfied from record evidence or their own knowledge or other legal testimony adduced before them that he is not a legal voter. . . ."²³

The judges of the election were to be appointed by the justices of the peace, who, in turn, were appointees of the Democratic legislature. The law directed that two of the four judges of election for each precinct should be, wherever possible, of a different political party from that of the registrars.²⁴ But it was not always "possible" to find competent Republicans to act as election judges, and

²¹ The eight Republican counties were Edgecombe, Greene, Lenoir, Jones, Craven, Northampton, Warren, and Halifax. The two Democratic counties were Wilson and Wayne (*Public Laws of North Carolina, 1876-1877*, chap. cclxxv, sec. 48; *Laws and Resolutions of the State of North Carolina, 1876-1877*, Raleigh, 1877, p. 533; R. D. W. Connor, ed., *A Manual of North Carolina, 1913*, Raleigh, 1913, pp. 1001, 1002).

²² *Public Laws of North Carolina, 1876-1877*, chap. cclxxv, secs. 8, 14, pp. 518, 519, 522.

²³ *Ibid.*, chap. cclxxv, sec. 63, pp. 537, 538.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. cclxxv, sec. 9, p. 519.

the party division was not made in every instance. In some cases, illiterate and gullible Negroes or corruptible whites were appointed to serve as Republican judges, and the Democrats were able to dominate the situation.

This effort made by the legislature to strengthen the hands of the registrars and judges of election was reinforced by the attitude of the state Supreme Court. In the case of *Harris vs. Scarborough*, the lower court held that, to the query of "Residence?" by the registrar, the person desiring to be registered must, of his own accord, give more detailed information than simply "North Carolina." This case reached the State Supreme Court on appeal in 1892, and the verdict of the lower court was upheld. In giving the judgment of the court Judge Avery said: "In the absence of proof to the contrary, it is always presumed that the officer has done his duty. Every citizen is always presumed to know the law. . . . In the absence of any definite information on the subject, the failure to enter upon the registration books such facts connected with the history of an elector as the statute imperatively requires as a prerequisite to the exercise of the elective franchise, must be considered due to the carelessness or inexcusable ignorance of such elector . . . the registrar, if he read the headings calculated to elicit the requisite answers, certainly did all the law required of him."²⁵

Judge Walter Clark, in a dissenting opinion, pointed out very aptly that the registrar might have had more definite answers had he made any effort to elicit them, and that while all electors were presumed to know all provisions of the election law, as a matter of fact, the majority of electors, especially the more ignorant ones, did not know them.²⁶

It is easy to see how numbers of illiterate Negroes might have been deprived of the privilege of voting through technicalities. The United States House of Representatives Committee on Elections learned, in examining the contested election case of *Lockhart vs. Martin*, arising out of the Congressional election of 1894, that votes were rejected by the registrar in Rockingham Township, Richmond County, North Carolina, because "the voters gave their places of residence as at 'Father's place;' at 'Mr. Ledbetters', . . . all of which places were well known to the registrar and the election officers to be in Rockingham Township." The report of the com-

²⁵ *Harris vs. Scarborough* (North Carolina Supreme Court Reports, CX, 232).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

mittee continues: "It appears very clearly from the evidence in this case that the Democratic registrar of Rockingham precinct made no effort whatever to enter the names of colored Republican and Fusionist voters upon the registration books in a proper manner, but upon the contrary made such entries opposite their names as he knew could be used as technical grounds for challenges."²⁷

Further evidence in this same contested election case reveals the partiality shown by the Democratic registrar in Stewartsville Precinct, Richmond County. The records show that three hundred and seven white men and four hundred and fourteen colored men were registered in this township; eight white and two hundred and eighty-four colored voters were challenged. One white man's vote and one hundred and sixty-seven Negro votes were rejected. The one white man whose vote was rejected was a Populist. Of the white men registered, two hundred and sixty-five voted, and forty-one did not offer to vote; one hundred and thirty-three colored men voted, and one hundred and twelve did not offer to vote. The precinct election officials—four Democrats and one Republican—returned two hundred and ninety-five votes for the Democratic candidate for Congress and fourteen for his Fusionist opponent. When on the witness stand, the Democratic registrar admitted that he had accepted incomplete answers to his questions, knowing that they would be used as technicalities to prevent those persons from voting.²⁸

While the Democrats thus maintained themselves in power following their complete triumph in 1876, what of the fortunes of the Republican party in North Carolina? Albion W. Tourgée, probably the ablest, yet one of the most unscrupulous, of the carpetbaggers in the state, wrote in April, 1878, "The Republican party of North Carolina is dead—dead beyond hope of resuscitation or resurrection." In the course of his essay, "In Memory of the Republican Party," he gave a classic description of the party of Reconstruction: "The Republican party was never indigenous to Southern soil. . . . A few thousand of the white people of North Carolina accepted it in 1868, simply as the equivalent of that Unionism which has always held so dear a place in their hearts. A few hundred Adullamites accepted it as the alternative of political bankruptcy and the shibboleth of profitable power; and a few score of earnest natures accepted

²⁷ *Lockhart vs. Martin* (United States House of Representatives, 54th Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 2002), pp. 5-12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-22.

it with a clear perception of its basic principles, and a *bona fide* belief in their beneficence and righteousness. A few hundred carpetbaggers received it as a spontaneous product of their native States, the sentiments for which they had fought and bled. The African race, in bulk, received it as the incarnation and sheet anchor of that liberty which they had just tasted. This was the Republican party of North Carolina. Ignorance, poverty, and inexperience were its chief characteristics."²⁹

As shrewd as were Tourgée's observations, he was not entirely justified in writing an obituary for the Republican party in North Carolina in 1878. True enough, the party was but a shadow of its former self. The carpetbaggers, in the main, had fled, the scalawags were politically ostracized, and the Negroes commonly lacked able leadership. But the lines must not be drawn too sharply. There were still Federal officeholders in the state who were Republicans, and the great majority of Negroes remained loyal to the party of Abraham Lincoln. The Negro by no means ceased to be a factor in North Carolina politics after the Democratic triumph. In the "Black" counties, especially, a surprisingly large number of Negroes continued to vote, and not an inconsiderable number were elected to office.

At this point, it may be well to review the subject of Negro office-holding during the years immediately following Reconstruction. The year 1876 is significant as the one in which the Democrats won complete control over the state government, but for some years after that date Negroes continued to sit in the legislature. The state Senate in 1877 was comprised of forty Democrats and ten Republicans, five white and five colored. These five Negro senators were: George A. Mebane (Third District), Windsor; John Bryant (Fourth District), Halifax; William P. Mabson (Fifth District), Tarboro; William H. Moore (Twelfth District), Wilmington; Hanson T. Hughes (Twenty-first District), Oxford. All five were born in North Carolina, but two—Mebane and Mabson—were educated in Pennsylvania. Mebane and Mabson were teachers, Moore was a painter, and Hughes was a barber. There is no record of Bryant's occupation except in politics; he was elected county commissioner of Halifax in 1868 and was sent to the House

²⁹ The "C" Letters as Published in "The North State" (Greensboro, N. C., 1878), No. V, p. 24. The "C" letters were published anonymously, but several authorities, including Professor J. G. deR. Hamilton, have identified the author as Albion W. Tourgée.

of Representatives the same year, was re-elected to the House in 1870, elected to the Senate in 1874 and again in 1876. Three of the group, other than Bryant, had likewise held other political offices.³⁰

In the House of Representatives in 1877 there were eighty-three Democrats and thirty-seven Republicans—twenty-six white and eleven colored. The Negro Representatives came from Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, New Hanover, Pasquotank, Pender, Warren, and Caswell counties. Offices held by members of the group prior to their election to the House were: magistrate, registrar, justice of the peace, ranger, county commissioner, and city treasurer. In addition, John H. Williamson, of Franklin County, and Wilson Cary, of Caswell County, had held seats in the Constitutional Convention of 1868. Cary had played a rather prominent role in that body, being known as an exceptionally good speaker.³¹

By 1879 the number of Negroes in the state Senate had dropped from five to two, and the number of Negro Representatives from eleven to nine. None of the five colored Senators who served in the session of 1877 were returned, but, in two instances, Negroes were succeeded by Negroes. Henry Eppes replaced John Bryant in the Fourth District, and Franklin D. Dancy succeeded William P. Mabson in the Fifth District. Though Eppes had had virtually no formal education he had represented Halifax County in the Convention of 1868 and had served previously in the Senate. He was a brickmason and plasterer by trade and, in addition, a Methodist minister. Dancy was born a slave of Lafayette Dancy, a prominent planter of Edgecombe County. Following his emancipation, he entered actively into politics, serving as commissioner of the town of Tarboro for two years and commissioner of Edgecombe County for two years. At the time of his election to the Senate he was working as a blacksmith. The engrossing clerk of the Senate wrote of him: "He is a fine specimen of his race in appearance and deports himself becomingly while in the Senate."³²

A few representative sketches of colored legislators of 1879 will suffice to give some impressions of the background and training of

³⁰ R. A. Shotwell and Natt Atkinson, *Legislative Record . . . 1877* (Raleigh, 1877), Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 9-10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-25.

³² J. S. Tomlinson, *Tar Heel Sketch-Book: A Brief Biographical Sketch of the Life and Public Acts of the Members of the General Assembly of North Carolina, Session of 1879* (Raleigh, 1879), pp. 9-10.

Negro officeholders of the period. Stewart Ellison, a carpenter who "never went to a day school," served as city alderman of Raleigh for eight years and as a director of the State Penitentiary for four years prior to his election to the House of Representatives. Despite his lack of formal education, however, he was described as being "far above the average of his race as to intelligence." William Henry Waddell "never went to school" and served his political apprenticeship as janitor of the city hall in Wilmington but became, in time, Superintendent of City Improvement of Wilmington and School Commissioner. Hugh Cale, of Pasquotank County, was a successful merchant who had accumulated property valued at about twelve thousand dollars. He was known to be "very temperate in his habits, having taken his last drink of spirituous liquor in 1865." Prior to his election to the House, he had been a magistrate, county commissioner, and treasurer of Elizabeth City.³³

Three Negroes represented North Carolina in the national House of Representatives during the period 1876-1894. The first of these, John A. Hyman, really belonged more to the Reconstruction than to the post-Reconstruction era, as his term in Congress ended March 3, 1877. He sought re-election in 1876 but failed. Like most of the Negroes who held office during Reconstruction, Hyman had little opportunity for education. He was born a slave near Warrenton, Warren County, North Carolina, in 1840. He was sold into the Lower South, but returned from Alabama to his native state after the war and engaged in farming. He soon became an active Republican and was rewarded by election to the Constitutional Convention of 1868. He also served in the state Senate for six years prior to his election to Congress in 1874. After his failure to secure re-election in 1876, he was made a special deputy collector of internal revenue for the Fourth District of North Carolina.³⁴

The second Negro Congressman from North Carolina was of an entirely different type. James E. O'Hara, a mulatto, was born in New York City and reared in Jamaica. After an academic course, he studied law in North Carolina and at Howard University in Washington. He practiced law in Enfield, North Carolina, where he built a handsome home. His political career began during Reconstruction, and he held several offices including that of engross-

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 103, 123.

³⁴ United States Congress, *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927* (Washington, 1928), p. 1136.

ing clerk in the Constitutional Convention of 1868, member of the state House of Representatives, chairman of the board of commissioners of Halifax County, and member of the Constitutional Convention in 1875. He first sought election to Congress in 1878, but was beaten by W. H. Kitchin after a very close contest. Four years later he was elected and served in the Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth Congresses, being replaced in March, 1887, by a young Democrat whose political star was just rising—Furnifold M. Simmons. O'Hara's defeat in 1886 may be attributed in part to the fact that he was also opposed by Israel B. Abbott, another Negro Republican.³⁵

Henry Plummer Cheatham was the third of North Carolina's Negro Congressmen. Like O'Hara, Cheatham had a good education. He was born and reared near Henderson in Granville (now Vance) County, attended local public schools, and then was graduated from Shaw University in Raleigh in 1883. An active Republican, he was a delegate to the Republican State Convention in Raleigh in 1892, the national convention in Minneapolis in 1892, and the national convention in Philadelphia in 1900. The only political office which he held prior to his election to Congress was that of register of deeds of Vance County from 1884 to 1888.³⁶ When he first ran for Congress in 1888 he was opposed by another Negro and by Furnifold M. Simmons, the Democratic incumbent. His Negro opponent mysteriously left the state, and there was a rumor to the effect that a thousand-dollar bribe was responsible for his departure. Cheatham, a mulatto, very shrewdly appealed to the Negro vote of the district by telling the Negroes that "if Boss Simmons and Boss Cleveland were elected they would put them back into slavery."³⁷ He was elected and served in both the Fifty-first and Fifty-second Congresses. After his defeat in 1892, he remained in Washington for four years, acting as recorder of deeds of the District of Columbia. He then left politics and returned to Oxford, where he became superintendent of the North Carolina Colored Orphanage.³⁸

These Negro Congressmen were well above the average of their race in North Carolina in ability and, in the latter two cases, in

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1369. J. Fred Rippy (ed.), *F. M. Simmons, Statesman of the New South: Memoirs and Addresses* (Durham, N. C., 1936), p. 16.

³⁶ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927*, p. 805.

³⁷ Rippy (ed.), *F. M. Simmons, Statesman of the New South*, p. 17.

³⁸ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927*, p. 805.

training. Their records in Congress, though creditable, were not outstanding.

Occasionally, Negro majorities voluntarily supported a white Democrat for office. This seems to have been true in the case of the election of Rufus Amis, of Granville County, to the state House of Representatives in 1878.³⁹ But, generally, the Negro support went to white or colored Republican candidates during the 1870's and 1880's. Democratic candidates in "Black" counties or "Black" districts were elected frequently, but in no small number of cases trickery and fraud were responsible for their successes. One device of the Democrats was to seek to divide the Republican opposition by convincing the Negroes that they had not been allotted a fair share of places on the Republican ticket. In Granville County, during the campaign of 1884, the Democratic leaders persuaded Tom Lewis and Banky Gee, influential Negroes, to call a rump Republican convention. This convention decided not to support two regular Republican candidates, but, instead, nominated Walter Patillo, "a sleek, oily, Negro school-teacher" for register of deeds and W. K. "Spotted Bull" Jenkins, "a large, powerful, freckled-faced fellow who raised cattle for the home market," for the state Senate. The Negro candidates proved so popular that the Democrats, in alarm, supported the Republican regulars with money in order to checkmate the Negroes.⁴⁰ This game of *divide et impera* was precarious at best.

Both Republican and Democratic politicians appealed to race feelings. White Republicans fraternized with the Negroes during the campaigns and sought to array them solidly against the Democrats. Some of these Republican candidates were men of considerable ability and masters of the art of stump speaking, especially when haranguing a crowd made up largely of Negroes. Such a person was James I. Moore, of Granville County, a former Union Whig, who had joined the Republicans rather than support the Democrats. Moore was a candidate for the state Senate in 1884, and his stock theme was a castigation of the Democrats for bringing on the Civil War and for their rascality toward the Negroes. "'Nigger, nigger, nigger' is its [the Democratic party's] only cry. The Nigger is the Democratic stalking-horse. Down in Hell—and Hell's where the

³⁹ Tomlinson, *Tar Heel Sketch-Book . . . General Assembly, 1879*, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁰ Robert W. Winston, *It's a Far Cry* (New York 1937), p. 160.

Democrats belong—Down in Hell you can tell a Democrat every time. There he sits holding some little skinny-headed Negro between him and the fire.” The effects of such a denunciation before a crowd of Negroes can well be imagined. His words were met with cheers, guffaws, and shouts of “Give ’em Hell, Sheriff,” “Dat’s de Gowd’s truf,” and “Man, ain’t he burnin’ de wind!”⁴¹

Democratic candidates were not above appealing for the Negro vote when it appeared likely that they could get it, but usually it seemed more expedient to draw the color line and denounce the white Republicans for threatening “White Supremacy” by their use of Negro support. To use the words of Robert W. Winston, who then lived in Oxford and who was very active politically during the 1880’s: “We stirred the passions of the whites and told of Radical corruption and thievery. We asked the white man if he was going to give up his government to the black man.”⁴² Winston has described very vividly one of the local barbecues and political rallies of 1884: “Sheriff Bob Garner dispensed the liquors, and no man refused a drink. My task was to excite passion, stir up the whites, and put on the rousements, and this I did to the best of my ability. I paid special attention to the Negro candidate for Register of Deeds, Walter Patillo, whose privilege it would be to issue marriage licenses to white boys and girls.”⁴³

No scruples were felt about the use of trickery and appeals to passion rather than to reason. Granville County had had its share of Negro officials and bad government. The credit of the county was about ruined, and this had to be changed. Furthermore, the Democrats wanted the offices. Judge Winston in later years has admitted that the methods used to win elections were highly questionable, but the end seemed to justify the means at the time. By way of extenuation, he added: “. . . we in Granville had been much more honest in our methods than our brethren down East. In that section it had been necessary to resort not only to fraud but to violence.”⁴⁴

That an appeal to racial solidarity and to a one-party system in the state was regarded as the most effective Democratic propaganda is attested to by its frequent recurrence in the official publications of the party. In the handbook issued by the Democratic State Executive Committee in 1884 appeared these words: “The Democratic

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

party is the white man's party, and the Radical party is the negro man's party. . . . Negroes who can vote and who fail to vote at least once during an election are as scarce as dead mules. It is to be expected, therefore, that the party action of the Radicals should be in favor of the negroes and require the constant warning cry on our part to white men. . . . We cannot afford to destroy or weaken the Democratic party. It has rescued the state from Radical misrule. . . ."⁴⁵

[Again, in the campaign literature of 1888, we find the same note: "The Radicals say that the Democrats are constantly calling out 'Negro' and talking about the color line, and it is partly true. The Democratic party is the white man's party, and it is against their creed that a Negro should be in authority over a white man, and the Radical party is the negro man's party and thinks a negro is as good as a white man."⁴⁶

Occasionally there was a little rebellion against Democratic methods and an attempt to break away from the principle of "one party for the white men." Such was the Liberal Republican movement in the state in the early 1880's. It attracted some rather prominent men, including recent withdrawals from Democratic ranks. Among its leaders were Dr. Tyre York, "a rough, honest mountaineer"; Washington Duke, rising industrialist of Durham; Alex. Peace; Isaac J. Young; Colonel John R. Winston; Patrick Winston; and Francis D. Winston. In the course of a speech, Francis D. Winston asserted that the Democratic talk of Negro domination was but a scarecrow to frighten the whites. "Surely two million whites, with all the wealth, all the soldiers, and all the guns, can withstand one million poverty-stricken, defenseless Negroes, and if not they deserve defeat."⁴⁷

This was heresy indeed. A Democratic cartoonist promptly portrayed Mr. Winston riding in a carriage seated beside a gaudily dressed Negro politician, puffing a large cigar.⁴⁸ The Liberal Republicans were handicapped by the party name and by the inevitable connections with the Negroes. The Democratic Executive Committee lashed out at the new party in 1884: "North Carolinians will

⁴⁵ Democratic State Executive Committee, *Democracy vs. Radicalism*, 1884 (Raleigh, 1884), pp. 78, 81, 82.

⁴⁶ Democratic State Executive Committee, *Democracy vs. Radicalism*, 1888, p. 26.

⁴⁷ Winston, *It's a Far Cry*, pp. 165-167.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

ever know the Radical party . . . the party of the carpet-bagger . . . the party of negro equality. . . . Radical eggs hatch nothing but Radical chickens. Strip a Liberal, and a naked Radical will stand before you every time."⁴⁹ The Liberal Republican movement was short-lived.

The appeal to race consciousness was terrifically potent. By continually parading the ghosts of Reconstruction and the realities of Negro participation in politics in the "Black" counties, the Democratic party became and, for more than two decades, remained "the white man's" party. During the period from 1876 to 1894 the Democratic party claimed to give, and, in the main, did give to the state "wise, frugal government," but its long-continued control cannot be explained without considerable emphasis being given to the Negro issue in politics. More than any other single factor it held the party together and kept the "Bourbons" in power.

⁴⁹ Democratic Executive Committee, *Democracy vs. Radicalism*, 1884, pp. 23-24.

CHAPTER III

POPULIST-REPUBLICAN FUSION AND ITS OVERTHROW, 1894-1898

"The Democratic party may divide on men. It cannot divide on measures, for there is no diversity of principle among them. . . . Another party will be formed, but not until a great and vital question shall arise for which men will fight and die. . . ." These prophetic words were written by Albion W. Tourgée, ex-carpet-bagger and shrewd political observer, in 1878.¹ For years North Carolina did remain a virtual one-party state. Then, in the early 1890's, the "vital question" which was to bring political division appeared in the form of demands on the part of Southern and Western farmers for government aid in their fight against hard times. The Populist party was born in the midst of a severe agrarian depression.

Harassed by abnormally low prices for agricultural products and correspondingly high freight rates, North Carolina farmers first sought to solve their common economic problems by co-operation in the Farmers Alliance. There was no immediate thought of a new political organization. Most of the North Carolina Alliance men were Democrats, and they hoped to secure the economic legislation which they deemed necessary through the instrumentality of their own party. Consequently, the state government was called upon to impose restrictions on the railroads and trusts—particularly the cotton-bagging trust. The Democratic party leaders were likewise urged to support "free silver" and other devices calculated to increase the amount of money in circulation.

The Democratic "Bourbon" leadership was not amenable to the pleading of the agrarians, however. The "Bourbon" democracy was essentially a businessman's regime interested in developing the New South industrially; its ideal was economical, laissez-faire government.² For years the tax burden had borne heavily on polls and real estate, while the securities of the businessmen had relatively escaped. At least that was the view of the Alliance men, and there is some evidence in support of it. Anxious lest business interests be

¹ *The "C" Letters*, No. V, p. 26.

² Alex M. Arnett, *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies* (Boston, 1937), pp. 10-11.

frightened out of the state, the government had tended to close its eyes to some of the less desirable practices of the railroads and corporations. Certainly, "trust-busting" at the behest of the farmers was one thing the "Bourbons" were not desirous of undertaking.

The lack of a real opposition party since Reconstruction had given the Democrats a false sense of security. Frequent reminders of the turbulent era of the carpetbaggers and scalawags had for years kept the mass of white men voting solidly Democratic. But by the early 1890's memories of Reconstruction were growing dim, and the people began to demand more of the party in power than simply the defense of the state against Negro rule. To many, that familiar cry seemed an outworn shibboleth. A more active policy with respect to current problems was demanded.

In the autumn of 1891 the *Progressive Farmer* began suggesting the organization of a distinct farmers' party. No longer should the farmers entrust their legislative interests to unsympathetic "Bourbon" leadership, it was said. Agitation soon produced action. Marion Butler, president of the North Carolina Farmers Alliance, immediately upon his return from the St. Louis Convention which launched the national Populist party, issued a call for a state conference to be held in Raleigh on May 18.³ The obvious purpose of the Raleigh meeting was the setting up of a Populist organization in North Carolina.

Democratic leaders became genuinely alarmed at the prospect of a division of the white vote. In an effort to forestall the development of a distinct farmers' party in the state, the Democrats hastened to nominate for governor Elias Carr, former president of the state Alliance. Planks calling for free coinage of silver and a graduated income tax were worked into the Democratic platform.⁴

These gestures did not pass unnoticed. Though openly supporting the national Populist ticket, Marion Butler and a number of other prominent North Carolina Alliance men exhibited a definite reluctance to oppose the Democratic candidates for state offices. The race issue was the deterrent to a complete break with the Democrats. Said Butler in the editorial columns of his newspaper, *The Caucasian*: "Whatever differences may exist among North Carolinians over a question of national policy, there should be none in the State

³ Simeon Alexander Delap, "The Populist Party in North Carolina," *Trinity College Historical Society Papers*, Series XIV, No. 2 (1922), p. 50.

⁴ *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia* (New York, 1893), N. S., XVII, 527.

where Anglo-Saxon rule and good government is the paramount issue. . . . If you (Populists) elect your ticket you do so at the suffrance of the Republican party, and you are at their mercy now and in the future."⁵

The ghost of Negro rule was still faintly visible to Butler, but to the majority of the Populists the economic issues seemed paramount. They were tired of Democratic promises and were anxious to try their wings. Butler himself was soon converted and induced to lead a bolt from the Democratic party. A Populist convention, held in Raleigh on August 16, 1892, put a full state ticket in the field. Butler was made party chairman, and Harry Skinner, of Pitt County, was nominated for governor. Skinner, a little wary of risking a Republican victory, asked permission to withdraw from the race if it should appear that the Republican candidate for governor might carry the state. But the Populists wanted no halfhearted standard-bearer. Wyatt P. Exum replaced Skinner as the Populist nominee for governor.⁶

The Populist party in North Carolina was essentially an opposition party to the Democrats and hence attracted a wide variety of adherents to its standard. There were depression-ridden farmers and those generally who felt that the Democratic party had ceased to be progressive. But there were also a goodly number of impractical idealists and political adventurers who were seeking to work out their own destiny in the ranks of the new party.⁷

The campaign of 1892 was closely contested. With Republican and Populist tickets in the field, Democratic supremacy in the state was really endangered for the first time since Reconstruction. The responsibility for directing the Democratic forces was entrusted to Furnifold M. Simmons, of New Bern, a comparatively young but thoroughly able political leader. Under his direction, a systematic program of public speaking throughout the state was arranged, and a vast amount of campaign literature was distributed. Instead of denouncing the Populists as deserters, the Democrats resorted to a policy of compromise and conciliation in the hope of bringing the disaffected back into the fold.

The energy and judgment exhibited by the Democratic Executive Committee plus the fear of what might happen in the "Black"

⁵ *The Caucasian* (Clinton, N. C.), July 2, 1892.

⁶ *News-Observer-Chronicle* (Raleigh), Aug. 17, 1892.

⁷ J. G. deR. Hamilton, *North Carolina Since 1860* (Chicago and New York, 1919), p. 221.

counties in the event of a Republican victory influenced the majority of voters to stick to the Democratic party and thus give the incumbent administration an additional two-year lease on the state government. Despite the Democratic triumph, the Populist candidates made a respectable showing. Dr. Exum, the candidate for governor, received 47,840 of the 274,043 votes cast,⁸ and eleven Populists were elected to seats in the legislature. The greatest Populist strength was in the East; Chatham, Nash, and Sampson counties, especially, gave large Populist majorities. These particular counties were not in the "Black Belt." At this stage the Populists were not actively bidding for the Negro vote.

The race issue was not greatly emphasized in the campaign of 1892, but the majority of Negroes who did vote seem to have voted the Republican ticket. The Republicans carried nine of the sixteen "Black" counties and three of the twenty-four counties having between 40 and 50 per cent Negro population. Whereas, in the counties having only from 30 to 40 per cent colored residents the Democratic victory was complete.⁹

In their anxiety to check the rising tide of Populism, the Democrats resorted to tactics which were, in the long run, to work to their detriment. Technicalities of the registration and election laws were rigidly enforced by Democratic election officials against Populist and Republican voters. Furthermore, the legislature of 1893, controlled by the Democrats, sought to restrict the activities of the North Carolina Farmers Alliance by amending its charter.¹⁰

Marion Butler, thoroughly incensed, called upon the Populists to exert every effort to elect men to the next legislature who would not only restore to the Alliance its original charter, but would also "repeal the force bill election law on our statute books which makes it possible for a corrupt machine in a party to defeat the will of the majority, even of that party, much less the majority of the people."¹¹

Fusion of the Populist and Republican parties, so much dreaded by the Democrats and sought by the Republicans, was effected during the campaign of 1894. Separate party organizations were maintained, but only one ticket—part Republican and part Populist—

⁸ R. D. W. Connor (ed.), *A Manual of North Carolina*, 1913, p. 1006.

⁹ Philip Johnson Weaver, *The Gubernatorial Election of 1896 in North Carolina* (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1937), p. 79.

¹⁰ *Private Laws of North Carolina*, 1893, chap. cxxxvii, pp. 193-195.

¹¹ Delap, "The Populist Party in North Carolina," p. 54.

was put in the field. Expediency was clearly the binding force; the two parties had little in common except hostility toward the Democrats and a desire for the rewards of victory.]

Democratic leaders tended at first to be somewhat contemptuous of the Fusionist¹² opposition, though there is reason to believe that they realized the seriousness of the threat to their supremacy before the time of election. In addressing the Democratic convention in Raleigh on August 8, the temporary chairman, J. C. Buxton, said: "We have to meet this year as we did two years ago—not one enemy alone, but two—one, old time Republicans, and another, acting as Republican co-adjusters, who call themselves Populists—a party the leaders of which are principally disappointed office hunters from the Democratic ranks. But whether they antagonize the Democratic party with their forces divided, or fuse their issues . . . the people of North Carolina will never consent that the Republican party shall return to power in this state."¹³

Despite optimistic Democratic predictions, the election resulted in an overwhelming Fusion victory; the Democrats lost control of both houses of the legislature. In the newly constituted Senate there were eight Democrats, eighteen Republicans, and twenty-four Populists. In the House of Representatives, forty-six members were Democrats; thirty-eight Republicans; and thirty-six Populists.¹⁴

The Negro vote was not a prime factor in determining the outcome of the election. Party leaders, however, were aware of his potential political strength. Democratic Senator Thomas J. Jarvis, indulging in some wishful thinking, expressed the opinion before the election that the great body of Negroes would not support the Fusionist candidates. They were disillusioned with their old leaders, he felt. "I believe the colored voter is beginning to think for himself, and hundreds of them this year will vote for those men and measures which they think will benefit their State and their race."¹⁵ This may well be interpreted as an indirect bid on the part of the Democrats for the Negro vote. A strict color line in politics had not yet been drawn.

Most of the Negroes continued their traditional connection with the Republican party, but the Populist-Republican fusion did not

¹² Populists and Republicans, collectively, were commonly called "Fusionists."

¹³ *News-Observer-Chronicle*, Aug. 9, 1894.

¹⁴ *Appleton's Annual Cyclopedia* (1895), N. S., XX, 555.

¹⁵ *News and Observer* (Raleigh), Aug. 24, 1894.

prove popular with them. E. A. Johnson, prominent colored lawyer of Raleigh, said during the campaign that there was a general impression among the Negroes that the Populists would oppose Negro office-holding and would insist that funds from the Negro taxes only be used for the maintenance of Negro schools. The Republicans, acting alone, had normally placed at least one Negro on the county ticket, and several had been elected. There was no reason for the Negroes to support the Populists he thought.¹⁶

That the Fusion victory would bring the Negroes more actively into politics was inevitable. For years the Republicans had denounced the Democrats for their cry of "Nigger! Nigger!" and had repeatedly promised to alter the Democratic plan of centralized government should they get control of the legislature. Furthermore, the support given the Republican party by the Negroes through the years obligated the Republican leaders to appoint some colored officials. However little the Populists might care to see the Negro advance politically, necessity forced them to join with the Republicans in playing for colored support.

The legislature of 1895, with its Fusionist majority, very promptly undertook the task of dismantling the Democratic election machinery. Early in the session, a bill "revising, amending, and consolidating the election laws of the State" was passed. Instead of having the officers of election chosen by appointed justices of the peace, as had been the case under the Democratic statute, registrars and election judges were to be named by the clerk of the court in each county, the clerk of the court being an elected officer. Each of the political parties was to have one representative on the board of registration and one of the three judges of election for each precinct. All registration and election officials were required to subscribe to an oath to support the Constitution and to perform faithfully the duties of their respective offices.¹⁷

The procedure for challenging the names of persons registered was changed rather significantly. Whereas the Democratic law had provided for inspection of the registration books and the challenging of doubtful names on the Saturday preceding election day, which was on Tuesday, the new Fusion law required that the challenging be done on the second Saturday preceding the day of election, thereby

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Aug. 22, 1894.

¹⁷ *Public Laws of North Carolina, 1895*, chap. clix, pp. 211-236.

giving a week longer to determine the qualifications of persons challenged. Furthermore, the law stated that "the entry of the name, age, residence, and date of registration of any person by the registrar, upon the registration book of a precinct, shall be presumptive evidence of the regularity of such registration. . . ." No challenging of names was to be permitted on election day, except in the case of those who had become qualified to vote since the closing of the registration books. A change was also made in the regulations regarding ballots. Section eighteen of the Fusion law provided that "All ballots shall be printed or written, or partly written and partly printed, on paper, which may be of any color, and may or may not have thereon a device."¹⁸ The Democratic statute which it supplanted had prescribed that the ballots be on white paper only and should not have thereon a party device.

Which of the two election laws came nearer serving the ends of justice is a matter of opinion. The Fusion law represented a reaction against the more intricate election law which had been designed by the Democrats originally to disfranchise the Negroes, but which had been used more recently to discriminate against white Populists and Republicans as well. The burden of proof was clearly shifted from the voter to the election officials. Under the earlier law, officials were given wide discretionary powers in determining the truth or falsity of the essential facts stated by the person seeking to register. The new Fusion statute, on the other hand, declared that the entry of the facts as given by the applicant upon the registration books was "presumptive evidence of the regularity of such registration."

This point of view was later endorsed by the North Carolina Supreme Court in the case of *Quinn vs. Lattimore*,¹⁹ decided in 1897. In this judgment, it was held that careless or fraudulent failure of a registration official to administer the required oath to an elector should not deprive him of his vote; that where a qualified elector, living near an uncertain boundary line, in good faith voted in the wrong township, his vote was to count. In other words, the benefit of the doubt was to be given to the elector.

Less exacting requirements for registration and voting undoubtedly tended to increase the number of Negroes participating in politics. Negroes who had been excluded for one cause or another

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *North Carolina Supreme Court Reports*, CXX, 246.

under a strict interpretation of a rather intricate Democratic election law were now permitted, and even encouraged, by Fusionist officials to vote. Exactly how many more Negroes voted under the Fusion regime than formerly cannot be determined, since election statistics are normally not classified according to race. However, the total number of votes cast in successive elections is indicative of the trend. In the gubernatorial election of 1892, when the Democrats controlled the election machinery, the total vote cast was 278,043, while four years later the number of votes had increased to 330,196.²⁰ Obviously the 53,153 additional votes were not cast solely by Negroes, but many of them undoubtedly were. Not only was the Negro vote being solicited by the Fusionists, but the Negroes had the added incentive of knowing that their votes would be counted and would help determine the choice of those who were to govern them.

Negro office-holding, by no means unknown yet not common during the years of Democratic rule, became quite general in the "Black Belt" after the passage by the legislature in 1895 of an "Act . . . to restore to the People of North Carolina Local Self-Government."²¹ Negro majorities in the "Black" counties could now elect from their own ranks county commissioners and other local officials whose positions had formerly been filled by appointment under the Democratic system of centralized government.

Tricks of gerrymandering, long used by the Democrats, were now appropriated by the Fusionists to serve their own ends. The charters of Edenton, Elizabeth City, Greenville, Wilmington, New Bern, Goldsboro, and other eastern towns were so amended as to place the municipal government, in almost every case, in the hands of Republicans or Populists.²² The case of Greenville furnishes a good example. Though the town normally had a Democratic white majority, the ward lines were so drawn as to enable the Negroes to elect four of the six councilmen. The Negro-controlled wards, the first and third, were shaped like "a broad-axe with a long handle" and the letter "V," respectively. Yet, being large, they were permitted to elect two councilmen each, while the more compact white wards, the second and fourth, were allotted only one

²⁰ R. D. W. Connor (ed.), *A Manual of North Carolina*, 1913, p. 1006.

²¹ *Public Laws of North Carolina*, 1895, chap. cxxxv, pp. 185-187.

²² *Private Laws of North Carolina*, 1895, chaps. xxxix, lxxxiv, lxxxvi, cxxi, clii, ccc, pp. 48-50; 96; 158-160; 198-200; 542-544.

councilman each. The Board of Councilmen, with its Negro majority, proceeded to appoint white Republicans as mayor and chief of police.²³

Wilmington was made an exceptional case. Its charter was revised in such a fashion that practically the entire city government was placed under the control of a police board appointed by the legislature. Naturally, the appointees were Fusionists, and Republicans or Populists were given the best positions in other branches of the city government.²⁴

As a result of these changes, the Negro soon came into his own in local and state politics. In New Hanover County forty Negro magistrates were appointed during the years 1895-1899. The other eastern counties, too, had their share of Negro magistrates—Bertie got sixteen; Edgecombe, thirty-one; Craven, twenty-seven; Halifax, twenty-nine; Granville, seventeen; and Caswell, seven. In all, the Fusion legislature of 1895 named about three hundred Negro magistrates.²⁵

Some Negroes were given higher positions. Craven County elected a Negro register of deeds, Negro deputy registers, three Negro deputy sheriffs, a Negro coroner, and a Negro commissioner. A Negro was elected register of deeds in New Hanover County, and there were added Negro constables and Negro deputy sheriffs. Warren County had a Negro register of deeds, a Negro commissioner, and four or five Negro postmasters.²⁶

In the making of state and federal appointments similar developments were taking place. James H. Young, a Negro, was made chief fertilizer inspector and a director of the State Asylum for the Blind. John C. Dancy, also a Negro, was appointed collector of customs for the port of Wilmington, and twenty-five Negro postmasters were named in sundry towns in the state. On the suggestion of Republican leaders in the state, a Negro deputy collector of customs for the Fourth District and a number of gaugers were appointed. Craven County was represented in the legislature of 1899 solely by Negroes.²⁷

Probably the most prominent Negro officeholder of the period

²³ *News and Observer*, Aug. 11, 1898.

²⁴ *Morning Star* (Wilmington, N. C.), March 30, 1895.

²⁵ *News and Observer*, Jan. 28, 1900.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1898; Jan. 28, 1900.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

was George H. White, of New Bern. He was born in Bladen County, North Carolina, was graduated from Howard University in Washington, and began the practice of law in New Bern in 1879. Though he was a Republican, his political career began during the days of Democratic supremacy in the state. First elected to the state House of Representatives in 1880, he later advanced to the state Senate, and then held the office of solicitor and prosecuting attorney for the Second Judicial District of North Carolina from 1886 to 1894. His influence in the state Republican organization is evidenced by the fact that he was twice named a delegate to Republican national conventions. With the backing of the Fusionists, he was elected in 1896 to represent the Second Congressional District in the national House of Representatives and was re-elected to his seat in 1898.²⁸ His record in Congress, though not outstanding, seems to have been no discredit to the state.

The effects of Negro office-holding in the eastern counties were generally regrettable. Most of the colored officials lacked experience; some of them lacked ability and integrity. But more important than the debatable point of the Negroes' qualifications for office, was the influence of Negro office-holding on race relations. There can be no denial of the fact that the white people of North Carolina resented having to deal with Negro officials. The whites accused the Negroes of insolence; the Negroes countered with charges of intolerance. Race relations in the "Black Belt" became strained almost to the breaking point.

From the Negro's own point of view, increased political activity under the existing circumstances was a doubtful asset. Some satisfaction was undoubtedly derived from the use of the ballot, but the majority of colored voters seem to have cast their votes in accordance with instructions given them by white Republican leaders. Judge George H. Rountree, of Wilmington, related that in the election of 1894 the Negroes of his city "exercised no choice at all," but "voted precisely as automatons."²⁹ Negro officials only succeeded in making themselves unpopular with their white neighbors. Such were the difficulties of attempting political equality in a "white man's country."

Despite the hazards, however, the Negro was drawn more and

²⁸ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927*, p. 1690.

²⁹ George H. Rountree, "My Personal Recollections of the Campaign of 1898" (MS in possession of Professor J. G. deR. Hamilton, Chapel Hill, N. C.). Hereinafter cited as Rountree, "Recollections."

more into the political battles. His vote counted as much toward election as a white man's. The campaign of 1896 witnessed a concerted effort on the part of the Republicans to draw a large Negro vote. The Democrats might well have done the same thing had not the Republicans had an initial advantage with the Negroes. Failing in their effort to reach an understanding with the Democrats, the Populists again effected a fusion with the Republicans. Both parties kept their gubernatorial candidates in the running but arranged for a division of the remaining elective offices. Thus the political line-up was virtually the same as in 1894.

Though a good many Populists refused to back a conservative and supported William A. Guthrie for governor, most of the opposition to the Democrats fell in behind Daniel L. Russell, the Republican candidate. Judge Russell was no novice in politics. He first went to the legislature in 1864, served as judge of his judicial district from 1868 until 1874, and returned to the legislature in 1876.³⁰ For some years prior to his campaign for the governorship, he had been practicing law in Wilmington.

Russell's previous attitude toward the Negroes had been none too cordial. He is reputed to have characterized the Negroes of the South on one occasion as "savages who stole all the week and prayed it off on Sunday" and who were "no more fit to govern or to have a share in governing than their brethren in the swamps of Africa." In his speech accepting the Republican nomination, however, he made a definite bid for Negro support, asserting that he had been nursed by a Negro woman and that he stood for the Negroes.³¹ This somewhat belated gesture did not satisfy all the Negroes. A colored Republican convention met in Raleigh in July and endorsed Guthrie rather than Russell.³²

For this and other reasons, there were suggestions that Russell step down in favor of Guthrie. But his friends did not permit it. H. D. Mason, of Chatham County, wrote to Judge Russell urging him to "stick." "We can tell the colored people that all reports relative to you are Democratic lies and it will suffice," wrote Mason.³³

³⁰ R. A. Shotwell and Natt Atkinson, *Legislative Record . . . Session Ending March, 1877*, p. 45.

³¹ J. G. deR. Hamilton, *North Carolina Since 1860*, pp. 258-267.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ H. D. Mason to Daniel L. Russell, July 18, 1896 (Daniel L. Russell Papers, University of North Carolina Library).

There is evidence that Russell made a determined effort to gain Negro support during the campaign. A very revealing letter from one of his friends in New Bern states: "I looked up your old colored friend Caesar Morton and gave him the five dollars. . . . Says he prays that God will let him live long enough to put in one vote for you."⁸⁴ From Wilkes County, a Republican lieutenant wrote: "I took a big black fellow, set him on a block and auctioneered him off at \$1500.00 and then made appropriate references to their former state and the Democratic party. The Negroes went wild and swore they would lynch any Negro that voted the Democratic ticket."⁸⁵

These tactics were quite successful. Daniel L. Russell was elected governor—the first Republican to hold that office since Reconstruction—and the Fusionist majority in the legislature was maintained. The Republicans and Populists were jubilant; a flood of congratulatory telegrams and letters poured in on Judge Russell. A supporter from New Bern, more enthusiastic than literate, wrote: "The Bourbons here in town one Set of bad Looking men they Look like Sick turkeys they say that North Carolina will now be under controle of the darkeys."⁸⁶

By no means the only determinant in deciding the election, the Negro vote was, nevertheless, very important. Before the election, the Democrats realized how the Negro support was swinging and began to inject the race issue into the campaign. Any incident involving race feeling was branded "Russellism," and the specter of "Nigger rule" was held up.⁸⁷ The outcome of the election tended to bear out, at least in part, the Democratic assertions. Russell carried the solid "Black Belt," whereas four years earlier the Republicans had won only nine of the sixteen "Black" counties.⁸⁸ A correspondent from Mecklenburg County wrote to the governor-elect in December: "The vote you got in this county came almost entirely from the colored people. . . . There are two good positions here that come from the National Government. The Post Office and the Mint. My individual opinion is that the whites ought to have one of the places, and the colored the other."⁸⁹ Negro ap-

⁸⁴ Robert Hancock to Daniel L. Russell, July 22, 1896.

⁸⁵ J. D. Henderson to Daniel L. Russell, May 21, 1896.

⁸⁶ Littleton J. Potter to Daniel L. Russell, Nov. 5, 1896.

⁸⁷ Weaver, *The Gubernatorial Election of 1896 in North Carolina*, pp.

71, 73.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸⁹ J. S. Leary to Daniel L. Russell, Dec. 9, 1896.

pointments did follow in even greater numbers than during the previous two years of Fusion rule. The *News and Observer*, with perhaps some exaggeration, placed the number of Negro officeholders in the state after the complete Fusion victory of 1896 at about a thousand.⁴⁰

The Democratic leaders were powerless to do anything about the situation immediately but, sensing the undercurrent of race feeling, looked forward expectantly to the election of 1898. Resentment against the Negro in politics was a smouldering fire which could be fanned into full flame. A fight for "White Supremacy" might save the state from numerous ills and, incidentally, might return the Democratic party to power. The campaign was really initiated when the Democratic Executive Committee met in Raleigh on November 30, 1897, and issued an address to the people of the state: "We have fallen on evil days in North Carolina. . . . They demonstrate the truth that no Southern State can be governed with honor and decency by the Republican party. Too large a number of its voters are ignorant for the masses to control, and too large a number of its leaders are venal and corrupt to give North Carolina good government. . . . The Democratic party promises the people on its return to power to correct all these abuses."⁴¹

Furnifold M. Simmons, who had directed the successful campaign of 1892, was again named chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee. He promptly set to work revamping his old political organization and making plans for the coming fight.⁴²

Both the Democratic and Populist conventions were held in Raleigh during the month of May, 1898. When the Populists assembled on May 17, the party was divided into two factions over the question of future policies. One group led by Congressman Harry Skinner, Otho Wilson, and A. S. Peace, favored continued cooperation with the Republicans; while the other, controlled by Senator Marion Butler, Cyrus Thompson, and Hal W. Ayers, leaned toward fusion with the Democrats. The Butler faction won in the convention, and overtures were made to the Democrats.⁴³

Josephus Daniels, editor of the Raleigh *News and Observer*, and a number of other prominent Democrats favored making a deal

⁴⁰ *News and Observer*, Oct. 30, 1898.

⁴¹ *Morning Star*, Dec. 2, 1897.

⁴² Rippey (ed.), *F. M. Simmons, Statesman of the New South*, pp. 22, 23.

⁴³ *News and Observer*, May 18, 1898.

with the Populists since the latter had apparently "repudiated Republicanism."⁴⁴ But the Democratic Convention, in session on May 26, politely rejected the Populist suggestion of fusion.⁴⁵ The Simmons group already had plans which included no compromises.

Chairman Simmons declared unrelenting war on the Republicans and those Populists who continued to support them. He attempted an exposé of certain Fusionist state officials, charging them with "squandering and stealing." In an exchange of open letters with J. M. Mewborne, superintendent of the state penitentiary, Simmons condemned the "corruption and arrogance of the 'Republican-Negro rule'" and called upon Anglo-Saxons to stand together in defense of "White Supremacy."⁴⁶ Simmons's letter to Mewborne, dated July 27, 1898, was given a great deal of publicity by the newspaper press, and more than one hundred thousand copies were distributed by the Democratic committee. "White Supremacy" became the Democratic watchword during the campaign.

Though the Populist party's offer of fusion with the Democrats had been rejected, no efforts were spared to bring individual Populists back into the Democratic fold. Far and wide, it was proclaimed that the Democratic party had been "washed, purged, and made white as snow." The older "Bourbon" leadership of the party, to which the Populists had objected in the early 1890's, had now been replaced by a younger and, it was said, a more progressive group of men. Senator Zebulon B. Vance had died in 1894, and Matthew W. Ramsom had been replaced in the Senate by the Populist leader, Marion Butler, in 1895. Now new names headed the Democratic roll: Furnifold M. Simmons, Charles B. Aycock, Henry G. Connor, Robert B. Glenn, Claude Kitchin, William W. Kitchin, Locke Craig, Cameron Morrison, and others too numerous to mention. These men talked of a new day in North Carolina. There were to be far-reaching reforms, they promised. Many of the demands made by the Populists when they "seceded" in 1892 were now included in the Democratic platform of 1898. Among these were fair election laws, improvement of the public school system, a law prohibiting the promiscuous giving of passes by the railroads, extension of the power of the railway commission, an income tax, and free coinage of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, May 19, 1898.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, May 27, 1898.

⁴⁶ Rippey (ed.), *F. M. Simmons, Statesman of the New South*, pp. 23, 24; *News and Observer*, July 28, 1898.

silver.⁴⁷ Many Populists were attracted by the Democratic promises and returned to their former places in the Democratic ranks.

Under the able direction of Chairman Simmons the gospel of "White Supremacy" was spread in every section of the state by public speakers and by an active Democratic press. Local committees helped carry on the fight for the "restoration of good government in the State." The campaign enthusiasm was not always spontaneous, but pains were taken to work it up. The handling of the situation in Wilmington furnishes a good example of Democratic technique. In August, 1898, the political scene in the coastal city was "extremely quiet." But soon a campaign committee of twenty businessmen was organized, and four of this number—Sheriff Stedman, E. G. Parmele, Colonel Walker Taylor, and Judge George Rountree—were chosen to direct the local fight. A campaign chest of three thousand dollars was raised in one morning. In order to interest the masses in the political issues, a "White Supremacy" club was organized there, as in other sections of the state, under the direction of Francis D. Winston, of Bertie County. Speeches were made before the club with the deliberate purpose of inflaming the white man's sentiment against the Negro. Judge Rountree started one such tirade, but soon realized that the club members were "already willing to kill all the officeholders and all the Negroes," and so he became more pacific in his statements.⁴⁸

The strained relations between the races in Wilmington had an important influence on the course of the campaign. The local chairman of the Populist executive committee wrote to Senator Marion Butler as follows: "The situation here, derived from the pronounced Negro office-holding and their [*sic*] consequent insolence has produced an issue rather of *race assertiveness* than of questions of political economy. So ominous is this condition that partisan affiliation is derided and but one question irresistibly commands the attention of our citizens—that of race supremacy."⁴⁹ The official Populist organization refrained from nominating candidates for local offices in New Hanover County.

The Republicans under the leadership of G. Z. French, an ex-

⁴⁷ [North Carolina] *Democratic Hand-Book*, 1898, pp. 188, 189.

⁴⁸ Rountree, "Recollections."

⁴⁹ Joseph Marion King to Marion Butler, Oct. 25, 1898 (Marion Butler Papers [shorter collection donated by Claude Moore], University of North Carolina Library).

carpetbagger, went ahead with their plans to make their nominations in October. The local Democratic committee realized the difficulty of beating the Negro candidates who were put up by the Republicans, yet it foresaw that unless Negro office-holding was checked a race riot would probably result. Consequently, E. R. Bryan, a former law partner of Governor Russell, was induced to go to Raleigh with James Sprunt and W. H. Chadbourn to confer with the Governor about the situation. As a result of the conference Governor Russell agreed to influence the New Hanover Republicans not to run a ticket.⁵⁰

An immediate crisis in October was averted, but the Wilmington situation was still potentially explosive. Indeed, scheduled speeches by Senators Marion Butler and Jeter C. Pritchard were cancelled because of threats to their lives. A leading Populist urged them not to appear in Wilmington, "at least until this frenzied madness subsides."⁵¹ Governor Russell, too, was threatened with assassination if he went to Wilmington.⁵²

Chairman Simmons at first found the people of the western counties hard to arouse on the subject of "White Supremacy." The "Black" counties were a long way off, and their problems seemed remote. Then he hit upon the idea of a pictorial campaign. Democratic newspapers were soon filled with photographs and cartoons of Negro officers and candidates. The *News and Observer* induced Norman E. Jennett, a young Sampson County artist who had made good in New York, to return to Raleigh during the campaign and caricature the Fusion leaders and their Negro allies.⁵³

The part played by the newspaper press in the campaign of 1898 can scarcely be overemphasized. In this field, the Democrats clearly had the advantage. The Populist-Republican cause was defended by Senator Butler's *The Caucasian* and a score of lesser sheets, but the Democrats had the backing of such leading daily papers as the *News and Observer* (Raleigh), the *Charlotte Daily Observer*, and the *Morning Star* (Wilmington). The *News and Observer* was especially vigorous in its attacks on the Fusionists and Negroes in general. Any threats made or crimes committed by Negroes were sensationally described. The following editorial of October 18 is

⁵⁰ Rountree, "Recollections."

⁵¹ Joseph Marion King to Marion Butler, Oct. 25, 1898.

⁵² Daniel L. Russell to Marion Butler, Nov. 12, 1898.

⁵³ *News and Observer*, Aug. 6, 1898.

typical: "The triumph of the Fusion looters at the polls in November would mean the loss of millions of dollars in productive enterprises within the next few years. . . . Already the influx of capital, which had begun under the honest and safe administration of the Democratic party, has been checked. . . . In its stead the Fusionists have nothing better to offer than a horde of ignorant and semi-civilized Negroes from Virginia and South Carolina who are waiting for the triumph of Fusion to descend upon the state."

In the heat of the campaign, "Ben" Tillman came over from South Carolina and in a speech at Fayetteville, on October 23, told how the Negroes had been disfranchised in his state.⁵⁴ Largely as a result of Tillman's visit, the "Red Shirt" organization which had been so popular in South Carolina, took hold in North Carolina. In some respects the "Red Shirts" resembled the earlier Ku-Klux Klan, but there were important differences. The "Red Shirts" were not masked, and few if any real acts of violence were proved against them. The strategy was mainly one of intimidation; Negroes were warned of dire consequences if they continued to take an active part in politics.)

Talk of Negro disfranchisement inevitably came up during the campaign. Fusionist leaders capitalized the fear of general disfranchisement, charging that a Democratic victory would mean the end of political privilege for all illiterates—white as well as black. Such a program of disfranchisement the Democrats disavowed most emphatically. On September 25, Chairman Simmons issued the following statement through the Democratic press: "For the past twenty years or more, just before every election, the Republican speakers, at their midnight meetings, have been in the habit of telling the Negroes if the Democrats came into power their right to vote would be taken away from them. . . . Finally the Negro himself began to see through the trick. He had seen the Democrats in full power in the State for twenty-two years, and had learned through experience that the party did not propose to disfranchise him. . . . So the old Republican scarecrow had to be hauled down and put away."⁵⁵

This denial might not ring true, but expediency demanded it. If the Democrats had any pre-election plans of disfranchising illiterates, they could not afford to publish such a program, for it would certainly have lessened the Democratic chances of victory in the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1898.

⁵⁵ *Charlotte Daily Observer*, Sept. 25, 1898.

western counties, where the rate of white illiteracy was comparatively high. Democratic leaders did propose, quite openly, to deprive the Negro of his political power, but how this was to be done was not clearly stated during the campaign. The Democrats were simply going to "save the State from Negro rule."

The effectiveness of the Democratic "hymn of hate" became more and more evident as the campaign progressed. Colonel Alfred M. Waddell talked vaguely of choking the mouth of Cape Fear River with the bodies of Negroes, and his sentiments were applauded not only in Wilmington but rather generally in the state. Using stationery of the Church Periodical Club of Hillsboro, Miss Rebecca Cameron wrote to Colonel Waddell: "If the white men can stand Negro supremacy we [women] neither can nor will. . . . It is time for the shotgun to play a part, and an active one, in the elections. More especially if that infamous malignant blot upon the state—our Chief Executive Russell—gets his Yankee bayonets. . . . We applaud to the echo your determination that our old heroic river shall be choked with the bodies of our enemies white and black, but what the state shall be redeemed."⁵⁶

✓ The embitterment of feeling between the races was an ~~unfor-~~unate but inevitable consequence of this type of campaign. Judge Henry G. Connor afterwards wrote that the politicians "stirred the minds and feelings of the people more deeply than they intended."⁵⁷ Certainly they were very deeply stirred.

Rumors kept circulating in the newspapers that the Negroes were bringing arms into the state.⁵⁸ Reports that the Fusionists of Wilmington had ordered two hundred Winchester repeating rifles led to an arming of the Democrats.⁵⁹ Caution and forbearance on both sides kept Wilmington relatively peaceful until after the election, but occasional minor clashes took place elsewhere in the state. At Ashpole, near Lumberton, three white men were wounded in a brawl which followed the refusal of a white registrar to register a

⁵⁶ Rebecca Cameron to Alfred M. Waddell, Oct. 26, 1898 (Alfred M. Waddell Papers, University of North Carolina Library).

✓ ⁵⁷ Henry G. Connor to George Howard, Nov. 25, 1898 (Henry G. Connor Papers in possession of R. D. W. Connor, Archivist of the United States, Washington, D. C.).

⁵⁸ *News and Observer*, Nov. 1, 1898.

⁵⁹ Harry Hayden, *The Story of the Wilmington Rebellion* (Wilmington, 1936), p. 7.

Negro after, according to the registrar's story, the regular period of registration had ended.⁶⁰

Fusionist leaders accused the Democrats of deliberately fomenting and making political capital of race conflicts. Jeter C. Pritchard, North Carolina's Republican Senator, communicated with President McKinley with regard to the race troubles and suggested the possibility of calling in federal troops if the situation did not improve. Governor Russell, on October 26, issued a proclamation commanding "all ill-disposed persons" of whatever political party "to immediately desist from all unlawful practices and all turbulent conduct."⁶¹

As the campaign neared a close, both factions intensified their activities. The Democrats, however, waged the most vigorous offensive. A mass meeting in Goldsboro on October 27 attracted some eight thousand persons, and the railroads furnished special trains and reduced rates for the occasion. Most of the Democratic leaders of the state were present, and Senator John W. Daniel of Virginia was invited as a special guest.⁶² A final stirring address to the people of the state was issued by Chairman Furnifold M. Simmons. He charged that the Fusionists had increased the expenses of the government by three hundred thousand dollars, had sold public offices, and had grossly mismanaged state institutions. The address was climaxed by the familiar plea for "White Supremacy." "In the midst of all this din and conflict, there came a voice from the East like the wail of Egypt's midnight cry. It was not the voice of despair, but of rage. A proud race which had never known a master had been placed under the control and domination of that race which ranks lowest, save one, in the human family. . . . North Carolina is a WHITE MAN's state and WHITE MEN will rule it, and they will crush the party of Negro domination beneath a majority so overwhelming that no other party will ever dare to attempt to establish Negro rule here."⁶³

On November 8 more people turned out to vote than ever before in the history of the state. The fact that 337,960 of 380,000 possible votes were cast in the election is indicative of the widespread concern over its outcome.⁶⁴ The Democrats had turned the campaign into a crusade. R. B. Glenn eloquently asserted: ". . . the

⁶⁰ *News and Observer*, Oct. 24, 1898.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Oct. 26 and 27, 1898.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1898.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1898.

⁶⁴ *The Caucasian* (Raleigh), Feb. 1, 1900.

Greeks at Marathon were not more determined to conquer the Persians or die than our people were determined to wrest the government out of the hands of corrupt and incompetent men."⁶⁵

When the ballots were counted, it was determined that the Democrats had carried the state by a large majority. Only seven Fusionists were returned to the Senate and twenty-six to the House of Representatives.⁶⁶ Control of the legislature passed into Democratic hands, and it was this branch of the government that the Democrats were most anxious to recapture in order to put an end to Negro office-holding in the "Black" counties. Flushed with victory, the Democrats held jubilees throughout the state to celebrate their return to power. Raleigh erected a triumphal arch and staged an elaborate demonstration with a street parade, brass bands, and numerous speeches.⁶⁷

An explanation of the sweeping Democratic victory in 1898 must take into account a number of factors. In the first place, the Fusion organization which had been in power for four years was never a real, unified party. Populists and Republicans had joined their forces solely for the sake of expediency. The Populists had a reform program they wanted to put into effect, and they could not do it unsupported. But many Populists did not see eye to eye with their Republican allies. The question of the Negro in politics was an important stumbling block. The Populist attitude with respect to the Negro is clearly stated in a letter by Joseph M. King, of Wilmington, to Marion Butler during the campaign: "Senator, it cannot be truthfully asserted or proven that you have either encouraged or assented to Negro domination. By force of necessity our party has been compelled to use the Negro in order to elect such men to office as would enact our principles into law and honestly administer the state government."⁶⁸

Numerous letters reached Marion Butler during the campaign and immediately following the election which indicate very clearly that the Populists, in the main, did not relish the prospect of supporting Negro candidates. Others openly denounced further cooperation with the Republicans. W. E. Fountain, in a letter marked "strictly confidential," suggested to Butler as early as August that the Populists should look to the ultimate disfranchisement of the

⁶⁵ *Charlotte Daily Observer*, Jan. 28, 1900.

⁶⁶ *Appleton's Annual Cyclopedia* (1898), Third Series, III, 511.

⁶⁷ *News and Observer*, Nov. 15, 1898.

⁶⁸ Joseph Marion King to Marion Butler, Oct. 25, 1898.

Negro. He reasoned thus: "The Negro, as I hold, is a factor in our politics, and has been under Democratic rule, and I firmly believe was kept so by Democrats for the sole purpose of demoralizing and corrupting them and to use as a bugbear to scare white ignorant men, thereby solidifying them into the perpetuation of Democratic ring machine rule. I believe the time has come to force the white man idea in such a way as to compel the Democrats, should they be successful in securing the legislature, to disfranchise the Negro as Tilghman [Tillman] has done in South Carolina."⁶⁹

From Catawba, James H. Sherrill wrote in September: "This nigger racket if not fully met will hurt us some. . . . Were it not for the election law I think defeat would be a blessing to us. That alone caused us to fuse with the Republicans in this county . . . if we are forced to continue to fuse with the Republicans we might as well close up business."⁷⁰ Such views were at variance with those of the official Populist organization, but they lead one to believe that there must have been a good many desertions in the ranks.

Much evidence points to the conclusion that the "Red Shirt" campaign was climaxed by no small amount of intimidation and plain fraud on election day. All over the state Fusionists charged that they had been cheated at the polls. From Hickory came this assertion: "The Democrats . . . used money, liquor, lying, fraud, bulldozing, ostracism, and every meanness that can be thought of. They worked day and night. Used women, preachers, and everybody. They brought the power of society to play. Those who owed merchants were made to keep their mouths shut, stay away or scratch."⁷¹

Many Democrats have since admitted that some of these charges were true, but the justification is always made that the deplorable situation brought on by the Fusionists necessitated the "redemption" of the state by such tactics.

The injection of the race issue into the campaign had given the Democrats a great advantage. The Fusionists had tried desperately to disprove the thesis that Populist-Republican rule was tantamount to Negro rule. On this point the *People's Party Handbook* . . . of 1898 said: "The cry of 'Negro Supremacy' and 'Negro

⁶⁹ W. E. Fountain to Marion Butler, Aug. 9, 1898.

⁷⁰ James H. Sherrill to Marion Butler, Sept. 15, 1898.

⁷¹ J. F. Click to Marion Butler, Nov. 13, 1898.

domination' is as absurd as a discussion of racial amalgamation. Neither is possible. . . . The truth is, the only thing that has preserved to the Democratic party in this state any life at all, is what is left of the prejudice that has heretofore been aroused over the 'race question.'"⁷² Specific cases were cited to show that Negroes had been appointed and elected to office by the Democrats.⁷³ Nevertheless, it could not be denied that Negro office-holding had greatly increased during the years of Fusion rule. In the popular mind, "White Supremacy" meant a return to Democratic supremacy.

Shortly after the election, John Spencer Bassett, a liberal young historian of Trinity College, wrote to one of his former professors at the Johns Hopkins University: "We are crowing down here like chickens because we have settled the Negro question. We don't see that we have not settled it by half. At best we have only postponed it."⁷⁴ As a matter of fact, Professor Bassett saw a good deal farther than most of his fellow Anglo-Saxons in the state.

One of the unfortunate results of the "White Supremacy" campaign was the Wilmington "Revolution" of November 10. For a long while there had been some friction between the races in the coastal city, but the situation was in no sense acute until racial animosities were aroused during the heated political contest. Negroes constituted approximately two thirds of the city's total population of twenty-five thousand and had taken over most of the work as brickmasons, carpenters, mechanics, etc. Continued immigration of Negroes was causing Wilmington to be regarded as a "city of lost opportunities for the working class whites."⁷⁵ Thus there was an economic background for the clash.

During the Fusion regime, political power was held by the Republican "Big Four"—Dr. Silas P. Wright, the mayor; G. Z. French, former postmaster of Wilmington and acting sheriff in New Hanover County; W. H. Chadbourn, the postmaster; and Flavell W. Foster. Their power rested mainly on their control of the Negro vote, and a number of Negroes held office. There were Negro aldermen, Negro policemen, and Negro firemen. John C. Dancy, a Negro, was collector of customs for the port of Wilmington. The Republican administration was reputed to have dissipated

⁷² *People's Party Hand-Book of Facts, Campaign of 1898* (Raleigh, 1898), p. 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.

⁷⁴ J. S. Bassett to H. B. Adams, Nov. 15, 1898 (John Spencer Bassett Papers, Johns Hopkins University Library).

⁷⁵ Hayden, *The Story of the Wilmington Rebellion*, p. 2.

public funds, neglected civic improvements, and tolerated gross immorality.⁷⁶

Early in the autumn of 1898 the Democratic "Secret Nine"⁷⁷ took preliminary steps looking toward a "redemption" of the city. A "Red Shirt" parade, with the men armed and on horseback, had created "enthusiasm among the whites and consternation among the Negroes."⁷⁸

The Republican decision, reached with the advice of Governor Russell, to refrain from running local candidates probably averted a clash on election day. A circular issued by six leading Populists and Republicans, including the chairmen of the two parties, admonished the Negroes to support their state and congressional tickets but to avoid aggravating incidents. "Do not hang around the polls on Election Day. Vote and go to your homes."⁷⁹

White sentinels were posted about the city on the day of election, November 8, but there were no important incidents. The next morning the Democrats of Wilmington were jubilant over the outcome of the election, and a great mass meeting was assembled at eleven o'clock. Resolutions were adopted which expressed, in general terms, the determination of the white men to control the city government in the future. The former Democratic mayor, S. H. Fishblate, introduced additional resolutions demanding the immediate expulsion of the Fusionist mayor and board of aldermen, but these resolutions were voted down. The meeting did go on record as declaring, "We will no longer be ruled . . . by men of African origin" and proclaimed the intention of putting the interests of the white race first in politics and economics. Four hundred and forty-six names were signed to the address.⁸⁰

A specific irritant to the whites was an editorial written by Alex. L. Manly, which had appeared the preceding August 18 in the *Daily Record*, Wilmington's Negro newspaper. Now that Democratic control seemed imminent, the mass meeting determined to ex-

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

⁷⁷ These were: Hugh MacRae, J. Allan Taylor, Hardy L. Fennell, W. A. Johnson, L. B. Sasser, William Gilchrist, P. B. Manning, E. S. Lathrop, and Walter L. Parsley (Hayden, *The Story of the Wilmington Rebellion*, p. 6).

⁷⁸ *News and Observer*, Nov. 4, 1898.
⁷⁹ Rev. J. Allen Kirk, *A Statement of Facts Concerning the Bloody Riot in Wilmington, N. C., Thursday, November 10, 1898* (a pamphlet, n. p., n. d.), pp. 3, 4.

⁸⁰ Resolutions Passed at Citizens Meeting held Nov. 9, 1898 (typewritten copy in Alfred M. Waddell Papers, University of North Carolina Library).

pel Manly and his paper from the city. A group of Negro leaders was requested to meet with a committee of white citizens the evening of November 9, in the Merchants Rooms of the Seaboard Air Line Building. There the Negroes were told to see that Manly left the city with his printing press within twenty-four hours. A white committee, headed by Colonel Alfred M. Waddell, was to be notified of Manly's intentions by seven-thirty o'clock the following morning.⁸¹

Manly quietly left the city, and the Negro committee wrote a letter to Colonel Waddell, denying all responsibility for the offensive editorial but agreeing to conform to the wishes of the whites in the interest of peace.⁸² This letter was dispatched by a Negro named Scott to Colonel Waddell. Instead of taking the message to the Light Infantry Armory, as the ultimatum had instructed, Scott mailed the letter. Consequently, at seven-thirty o'clock the next morning no word had been received from Manly or from the Negro committee. After waiting impatiently until nine o'clock, a white mob numbering about four hundred men went to Manly's newspaper office, broke in the door, wrecked the presses, and let the building "accidentally" catch fire.⁸³

The Negroes naturally became alarmed as word spread that their homes were in danger of being burned. Angry and frightened groups gathered in various parts of the city. Both the whites and the Negroes were armed, and the situation was an explosive one. A sworn affidavit of William McAllister, yardmaster for the Atlantic Coast Line Railway, states that a white man was remonstrating with a Negro to "go on," when the Negro shot and wounded him in the arm. Another shot came from the Negroes; then several shots from a group of whites. Three Negroes fell to the ground. Dan Wright, the Negro who apparently fired the first shot, was mortally wounded.⁸⁴

Rioting soon became general in several parts of the city. Before militia units from Wilmington and neighboring towns could restore

⁸¹ A. M. Waddell, Chairman, to Negro Committee, Nov. 9, 1898 (typewritten copy in Alfred M. Waddell Papers, University of North Carolina Library).

⁸² The Committee of Colored Citizens to Hon. A. M. Waddell, Nov. 10, 1898 (typewritten copy in Alfred M. Waddell Papers).

⁸³ Rountree, "Recollections"; *Morning Star*, Nov. 11, 1898.

⁸⁴ *Morning Star*, Nov. 11, 1898; Hayden, *The Story of the Wilmington Rebellion*, p. 16.

order, there had been numerous casualties, most of them suffered by the Negroes. Judge George H. Rountree gave the number as three white men wounded, eleven Negroes killed, and twenty-five wounded. J. Allen Kirk, colored pastor of the Central Baptist Church of Wilmington, later estimated that as many as a hundred Negroes were killed.⁸⁵ But Kirk and a number of other Negro leaders were forced to flee from the city while the riot was in progress, so he could only relay the somewhat exaggerated reports that came to him later from the city.

One of the most tragic features of the riot was the terror which seized the Negro population of Wilmington and led hundreds to seek refuge in the surrounding swamps despite the cold November weather. According to an eyewitness, "the woods were filled with colored people."⁸⁶ B. F. Keit, Populist member of the Wilmington Board of Aldermen, wrote a letter to Senator Marion Butler urging that a newspaperman be sent to Wilmington to find out the truth about the riot. "The poor Negroes," he said, "have been in the woods like so many cattle during all this bad weather. There are some of the saddest things about this wholesale shooting I have ever heard or known of."⁸⁷

The riot was followed by a political coup d'état. The Fusionist mayor and board of aldermen were forced to resign and their places were filled by Democratic appointees of Colonel Waddell's committee. Waddell himself headed the new city administration and immediately swore in two hundred and fifty white policemen.⁸⁸ White supremacy for Wilmington was assured.

The Wilmington "Revolution" was both applauded and condemned in the state. The *Morning Star*, local Democratic newspaper, justified the action of the whites on the ground of necessity. In an editorial of November 12, it said: "White supremacy, law and the preservation of order were asserted and asserted with prompt, terrific and effective force when it became necessary. The supreme law of self preservation became the law of the emergency. . . . It was the culmination of conditions that had prevailed for years and finally became intolerable."

⁸⁵ Rountree, "Recollections"; Kirk, *A Statement of Facts Concerning the Bloody Riot in Wilmington, N. C.*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Kirk, *A Statement of Facts Concerning the Bloody Riot in Wilmington, N. C.*, p. 10.

⁸⁷ B. F. Keit to Marion Butler, Nov. 17, 1898.

⁸⁸ *Morning Star*, Nov. 11, 1898.

Colonel Waddell was showered with telegrams and letters of congratulation on the spirited action taken by the whites of Wilmington. Wade H. Harris, editor of the *Charlotte Observer*, wrote "I have all along been convinced that sooner or later the white people would be compelled to take affairs into their own hands. That they have not done so sooner is an eloquent tribute to their mercy and forbearance."⁸⁹

On the other hand, Professor John Spencer Bassett of Trinity College, definitely a liberal on the subject of race relations, condemned the Wilmington affair as "justifiable at no point—a riot directly due to the 'white man's campaign.'"⁹⁰

It would probably be an accurate generalization to say that the majority of the white people of North Carolina regarded the Wilmington "Revolution" as a regrettable but more or less inevitable consequence of the active participation of the Negroes in politics. Sentiment for Negro disfranchisement was growing, and many became convinced after the riot that the only way to avoid such tragedies in the future was to eliminate the mass of Negroes from the electorate. The way was paved for North Carolina's "Disfranchising Amendment."

⁸⁹ Wade H. Harris to A. M. Waddell, Nov. 10, 1898.

⁹⁰ J. S. Bassett to H. B. Adams, Nov. 15, 1898.

CHAPTER IV

NEGRO DISFRANCHISEMENT, 1899-1900

The interval between the election in November, 1898, and the assembling of the legislature early the following January found the Democratic leadership in something of a quandary regarding the question of Negro suffrage. During the course of the recent campaign certain prominent Democrats, notably Chairman Simmons and Mr. Josephus Daniels, had promised that there would be no disfranchisement of illiterate voters.¹ Yet the rallying cry of the Democrats had been "Save the State from Negro Rule," and the overwhelming Democratic victory could easily be interpreted as an ultimatum to curb the political power of the Negro. The problem was that of accomplishing this result within constitutional limits.

Not all Democrats relished the task before them. Henry G. Connor, of Wilson County, who was being groomed for the speakership of the House of Representatives, wrote to Judge George Howard on November 11: "I wish some other Democrat had my seat. I dread the work before me. While willing to go a very long way to remove the Negro from the politics of the State, I am not willing to bring about the condition through which we passed four years ago. The situation is far from pleasant and the problem is full of complications."²

There were several possible avenues of approach. The new Democratic majority in the legislature might simply revert to the old stratagems of partisan election laws and shameless cheating at the ballot boxes, which had proved reasonably effective in curbing the political power of the Negro in the days before the Populist upheaval. But this system had obvious weaknesses. There was no way to guarantee continued white solidarity in politics, and any serious division among the whites would automatically give the Negroes the balance of power. Furthermore, the disfranchisement of the Negroes by irregular and illegal means had seriously lowered the political morality of the state. The people were calling for a permanent and legal elimination of the mass of illiterate Negroes from the electorate.

¹ *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 25, 1898; *News and Observer*, Oct. 25, 1898.

² Henry G. Connor to George Howard, Nov. 11, 1898.

Three Southern states had already pointed the way. Since 1895, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Louisiana had disfranchised the bulk of their Negroes by means of educational and property qualifications for voting. At the same time Mississippi and South Carolina had protected the suffrage rights of their illiterate white citizens by inserting the "Understanding Clause" in their state constitutions. Louisiana had adopted the "Grandfather Clause" for the same purpose. North Carolina might follow one of these charted paths.

At the request of the Democratic Executive Committee, Mr. Josephus Daniels, editor of the *News and Observer*, went to Washington to confer with a number of Southern senators concerning the problem of Negro suffrage. He then visited Louisiana and observed at first hand the effects of the suffrage plan recently adopted in that state. Upon his return to North Carolina, he reported that the "Grandfather Clause" was proving quite effective in protecting the suffrage of the "Cajans" and other illiterate whites, while most of the illiterate Negroes were being disfranchised by the educational tests.

The legislature which convened in Raleigh on January 4, 1899, was so overwhelmingly Democratic that any program endorsed by that party was not apt to meet with effective opposition. Henry G. Connor, a champion of suffrage reform, was chosen speaker of the House of Representatives. In his opening address Speaker Connor impressed upon his associates the seriousness of the work before them: "This body convenes at a period of intense interest to us and to all those who shall come after us. . . . There are questions to be settled. Grave questions they are, and the people of North Carolina expect us to deal with them wisely and with firmness. Times come when conditions demand what appear to be radical measures. That time has come in the history of North Carolina. The people expect us to discharge this duty. Let them not be disappointed."³

Francis D. Winston, of Bertie County, introduced on January 9, a bill which was essentially a copy of the Louisiana franchise law. This was promptly referred to the House Committee on Constitutional Amendments, of which George H. Rountree, of New Hanover County, was chairman. The committee considered a number of alternative proposals but at length recommended a measure which, though changed in certain details, included the basic principles of

³ North Carolina House of Representatives, *Journal*, 1899, pp. 12-13.

the Winston bill. It was felt that the qualifying clause in the Louisiana plan would be less open to dishonesty than the "Understanding Clause," which gave such great discretionary power to the registrars.⁴

In justifying the adoption of the "Grandfather Clause" by the House Committee, Chairman Rountree later wrote: "It was the desire of the committee to get that simple qualification of reading and writing to be the law of North Carolina as quickly as possible, but, in order to get the electorate to vote that change in the Constitution, it was necessary to make an exception in favor of those who, and whose ancestors, had been voting for many years in North Carolina. That exception was known as the 'Grandfather Clause,' and was adopted simply as a bridge to get over from the present status of unlimited adult male suffrage to a suffrage qualified by the ability to read and write."⁵

The parts of the proposed amendment designed to disfranchise illiterate Negroes without disfranchising illiterate whites were Sections 4 and 5:

Section 4: Every person presenting himself for registration shall be able to read and write any section of the Constitution in the English language; and in addition thereto, shall have paid on or before the first of March of the year in which he proposes to vote, his poll tax, as prescribed by law, for the previous year, and he shall exhibit his receipt therefor when he offers to vote. Poll taxes shall be a lien only on assessed property, and no process shall issue to enforce the collection of the same except as against assessed property.

Section 5: No male person who was on January 1, 1867, or at any time prior thereto, entitled to vote under the laws of any state in the United States wherein he then resided, and no lineal descendant of such person, shall be denied the right to register and vote at any election in this State by reason of his failure to pass the educational qualification prescribed in Section 4 of this article: provided he shall have registered in accordance with the terms of this article prior to December 1, 1908, and no person shall be entitled to register under this section after that date.⁶

The proposed restriction of the suffrage was obviously a matter of great concern to the Negroes of the state. While suffrage changes were being considered, the joint committee on constitutional amendment gave a hearing to a representative group of

⁴ Rountree, "Recollections."

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 10, 1899.

Negroes. Appearing in behalf of their race were Isaac Smith, Negro member of the legislature from Craven County, the Reverend R. H. W. Leake of Raleigh, and Professor Crosby of Salisbury. Chairman Rountree of the legislative committee explained that the Suffrage Amendment was being drawn up because the illiterate Negro was unfit for the use of the ballot, that this fact had been proved by thirty years' experience, and that the franchise must be curtailed for the welfare of the state.⁷

Leake and Crosby did most of the talking before the committee. Both Negroes were very moderate in their views. Leake said he knew that the Fusionist legislation with regard to Wilmington was vicious and that the Negroes were partially to blame for the election of such officers. Crosby, too, admitted that the majority of the Negroes were probably not good voters. Of some 125,000 Negro voters in North Carolina, only about 25,000, he thought, were qualified to form intelligent opinions on political questions. Too many voted the straight Republican ticket without question. This situation he labeled "a menace to our government." But he urged the legislature to be fair in their treatment of the Negroes. "You want," he said, "to disfranchise enough Negroes to make it certain that good government will prevail. Do that and stop. Do not go to the extent of persecution."⁸

Within a few days after the committee hearing, a "Negro Council" composed of sixty-nine delegates met in Raleigh. Among those attending the meeting were George H. White, Negro Congressman from the Second District, and John C. Dancy, Negro collector of customs for the port of Wilmington. A memorial from the Negroes was addressed to the legislature asking that no laws be passed, the effect of which would be "to blunt our aspirations, ruin our manhood, and lessen our usefulness as citizens. . . ." There was some talk of recommending that the Negroes migrate from North Carolina in the event that the Democrats made their situation "intolerable," but conservative sentiment prevailed, and no such resolution was adopted.⁹

The Democratic newspapers stood solidly behind the proposal to eliminate the Negro from the electorate, and most of them preferred a constitutional amendment to any other method. The *Charlotte Daily Observer* made the following editorial comment: "There

⁷ *Ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1899.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, Jan. 19, 1899.

seems to be no method by which the suffrage can be restricted in North Carolina to those who should vote except by the amendment to the Constitution. An election law which would permit the dominant party to count out the opposition or otherwise defraud it is open to objection on the ground that it is not honest and that its application tends to demoralize those who execute it and those who know of its execution for the purpose mentioned; for it must be seen that the tendency of dishonesty in politics is toward dishonesty in personal transactions."¹⁰

The *News and Observer* was even more enthusiastic in its approval of the Suffrage Amendment recommended by the Democratic caucus. It said editorially on February 10: "Last November it was only by such a campaign as exhausted every resource of the white men in the State that White Supremacy was secured. That victory was a signal one, but as long as there are one hundred thousand ignorant Negro voters entitled to kill the vote of an equal number of intelligent white men just so long are we in danger of being remanded to the terrible conditions from which we have escaped. . . . White Supremacy cannot be made permanent until the irresponsible Negro vote is removed. It cannot be removed except by adopting the Constitutional Amendment that will be shortly submitted."

The debate on the Amendment in the House of Representatives began on February 17. Chairman Rountree of the committee on constitutional amendments explained the proposal and defended its main points, giving particular attention to the "Grandfather Clause." There was no difference in principle, he asserted, between that clause and a section of the Massachusetts Constitution which imposed a literacy test for voting and then exempted from its operation those entitled to vote at the time of its adoption and all men sixty years or more of age when the law went into effect.¹¹

Rountree was followed in the House debate by Isaac Smith, a Craven County Negro. The saddest thought to him was that the very people whom he had held up to his race as their best friends were about to disfranchise them. The Negro, he said, regarded the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Feb. 1, 1899.

¹¹ North Carolina House of Representatives, *Journal*, 1899, p. 49; *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 18, 1899; Article of Amendment XX, Constitution of Massachusetts in *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1899 (Boston, 1899), pp. 4-5.

right to vote as the dearest thing on earth. "I tell you in four years from now you'll want to reconsider to-day's action and can't."¹²

Two other colored members, Eaton of Vance County and Wright of Warren County, spoke in behalf of their race against the Amendment. Wright labeled the proposed suffrage restriction, "a great sledge hammer of political death" for the Negroes.¹³

Francis D. Winston, the author of the original Winston bill, brought the debate to a climax with a dramatic burst of oratory in support of "White Supremacy": "I will not discuss the constitutional side of the question. Neither shall I pay any attention to men who come here to-day to prate of white supremacy, and whose every vote has been against the best interest of the people of North Carolina. Every man who now talks of white supremacy must show his faith by his works. Have we so soon forgotten New Bern, and Greenville, and Tarboro, and Wilmington?"¹⁴

The overwhelming Democratic majority in both the House and the Senate "showed their faith by their works." The Suffrage Amendment passed all legislative hurdles and was submitted to the electorate of the state, to be voted on at the next general election, August 2, 1900.¹⁵

Whether or not the suffrage restrictions were wise or just, it seems clear that the men who framed them were conscientiously seeking a workable solution of a difficult problem. They felt that the presence of a large number of illiterate Negro voters was retarding the development of the state; that the Negro issue in politics was preventing the consideration of more vital questions. As Speaker Henry G. Connor expressed it, "... we feel that we have a growth ... and for the preservation of the best there is in the State, we must cut it off and separate it from ourselves."¹⁶

The work of the General Assembly of 1899 with respect to the problem of Negro suffrage was by no means limited to the bill submitting the Constitutional Amendment to the people. That might or might not be ratified. Furthermore, should it receive the sanction of the voters, it was not to be effective until 1902. Conditions in the eastern counties demanded more immediate action if the

¹² *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 18, 1899.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ North Carolina House of Representatives, *Journal*, 1899, p. 490; North Carolina Senate, *Journal*, 1899, p. 493.

¹⁶ Henry G. Connor, "Speech Delivered at Trinity College, Feb. 22, 1899," *Trinity College Historical Society Papers*, Ser. IV, No. 2, p. 43.

Democratic promise of "redeeming the State from Negro rule" was to be carried out. Hence, early in the session, the legislature began to nullify the Fusionist local self-government system by appointing enough additional members on the various boards of county commissioners in the East to insure white control.¹⁷

A thorough revision of the election law was likewise undertaken by the Democratic caucus. In the first place, the time for holding state and county elections was set for the first Thursday in August instead of in November, the time of the national elections. The motive for this change, no doubt, was to eliminate the possibility of federal regulation or policing of the state elections.¹⁸

The machinery of elections was placed almost entirely in the hands of the dominant party. The legislature, now controlled by the Democrats, was authorized to elect seven "discreet" persons to act as a state board of elections. This board was to appoint the county boards of elections which, in turn, were to appoint all registrars and judges of elections for their respective counties. The statute also specified that a new state-wide registration be held before the next general election, in 1900, and registrars were given very considerable powers in passing on the qualifications of persons seeking registration. Furthermore, challenges of a voter's qualifications might be made on the day of election, thus making it most difficult for the person challenged to clear his record in time to vote.¹⁹

The dozen or so weekly newspapers published by Republicans and Populists protested in vain against the new Democratic election law. Most vehement was Senator Marion Butler's organ, *The Caucasian*: "The last words of a dying man tell whether he is a saint or a sinner. So with the present Legislature. . . . The election law is a plumb humbug. It's to count in the East. If the West will allow it, let her go. When a political party gets up such a law, it shows it is afraid of an honest election and a fair count. The law is made in the interest of the Democratic Bourbon machine, and your right to vote depends on whether they will let you vote or not. It disfranchises more whites than the amendment will Negroes. No difference between a Negro and a white man with an office-hunting Democrat."²⁰

The Democrats contended that the steps which they had taken

¹⁷ *Public Laws of North Carolina, 1899*, chap. clxx, pp. 310-311.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. dvii, pp. 658-687. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *The Caucasian* (Clinton, N. C.), March 2, 1899.

were necessitated by the race situation in the state, and that their election law was no more partisan than the Fusion law which it replaced.²¹

The legislature had scarcely adjourned to meet again on June 12, 1900, when the rival factions began to prepare for the impending fight over the Suffrage Amendment. The Democratic party, which had been responsible for the drafting of the Amendment, would naturally make every effort to insure its ratification by the electorate. The Republican party, led by federal officeholders and those state officers carried over from the Fusion regime, was equally as certain to wage a bitter fight against the proposed instrument of disfranchisement. The loss of a large number of Negro voters would be a severe blow to the Republican state organization. The attitude of the Populist party seemed doubtful at first. The Populists had never been enthusiastic about the Negro in politics. *The Caucasian* stated that if it were certain that the Amendment would take the Negro issue out of politics, the Populists would certainly support it. But serious doubts were expressed that such would be the result.²² In October, 1899, Senator Marion Butler announced that careful study had convinced him that the Amendment was unconstitutional, and the Populist organization lined up with the Republicans once more to fight their common foe, the Democrats, by seeking to defeat the Amendment.²³

The newspaper press played an active and important role during the campaign. Perhaps the most influential of the Democratic newspapers was the *News and Observer*, edited by Josephus Daniels. Both editorially and by means of the cartoons of Norman E. Jennett, the *News and Observer* kept up a relentless attack on the "Re-pop-lican" bosses and their Negro allies. Other press champions of the Amendment were the *Charlotte Observer*, the *Wilmington Messenger*, the *Wilmington Morning Star*, and the *Asheville Citizen*. The Democrats had an obvious advantage in the number and circulation of their papers. The opposition, however, was not entirely lacking in press spokesmen. *The Caucasian* was moved from Clinton to Raleigh and made the official Populist organ. It consistently opposed the Amendment. The *Asheville Gazette*, which had been Democratic, came out against the Amendment and largely reflected

²¹ *Charlotte Observer*, March 1, 1899.

²² *The Caucasian*, March 2, 1899.

²³ *News and Observer*, Oct. 8, 1899.

the opposition sentiment in the West. A dozen or more weekly publications of the Populists and Republicans added their none too influential voices.

The Democrats entered the campaign with two rather serious handicaps. In the first place, Chairman Simmons, the Democratic press, and a number of Democratic speakers during the campaign of 1898 had promised that if the Democrats carried the election no voter would be disfranchised.²⁴ Then, within three months after the election, the legislature, controlled by the Democrats, had framed and submitted to the people the Suffrage Amendment designed to disfranchise thousands of illiterate Negroes. The Fusionists were not slow to grasp this opportunity to berate the Democrats for their broken promises.

Democratic spokesmen could not alter the record. They did attempt, however, to explain this "seeming inconsistency" by saying that the promises made during the campaign represented simply the opinions of those individuals who made them. The *Democratic Hand-Book of 1900* explained further: "The proposed amendment is not the work of the State Executive Committee, or the chairman of any committee of individuals. It originated with the people at and just prior to the election. It was prepared and passed by the chosen representatives of the people and not by self-appointed bosses."²⁵

This explanation, though not very convincing, was perhaps as good as any that could have been made. There was no blinking the fact that the same men who had promised that there would be no disfranchisement had championed the Suffrage Amendment from its very inception.

Another charge of bad faith brought against the Democrats was that of violating the agreement with the Federal government under which North Carolina was restored to its position in the Union during Reconstruction. The Enabling Act of Congress in 1868 had readmitted North Carolina and five other Southern states only on condition that their respective state constitutions should never be amended so as to deprive any class of citizens of the right to vote who were enfranchised by the state constitutions adopted that year. The proposed Amendment was, of course, violative of the spirit of this agreement, since the sole purpose of the Amendment was to

²⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 25, 1898; *News and Observer*, Oct. 25, 1898.

²⁵ [*North Carolina*] *Democratic Hand-Book*, 1900, p. 4.

take away that political power which had been given to the Negroes in 1868.

This charge seems to have caused the Democratic leaders little embarrassment, since the great majority of North Carolinians decidedly abhorred the terms of Radical Reconstruction. Furthermore, it was asserted that the Reconstruction Acts were actually unconstitutional; the Negroes had been permitted to vote for the state constitution which provided for their own enfranchisement.²⁶

The principal argument used by the Populist and Republican speakers and writers against the Amendment was that the "Grandfather Clause" was unconstitutional. This clause embraced an obvious discrimination, they said, since Negroes had not been permitted to vote in North Carolina between the years 1835 and 1868. The chance of a Negro's proving that any of his ancestors voted before 1867 would be practically *nil*; hence the "Grandfather Clause" provided for a discrimination on account of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude," and was therefore violative of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Federal Constitution.²⁷ It was further asserted that if the "Grandfather Clause" were ruled unconstitutional the simple educational qualification for voting would stand and that this would result in the disfranchisement of thousands of illiterate white voters. The Fusionists lost no opportunity to stress this point, especially in the western counties where the rate of illiteracy among the whites was comparatively high. The poll tax prerequisite, it was pointed out, would bear as heavily on unfortunate whites as on unfortunate Negroes.

The Populist Executive Committee, in its resolutions of January 18, 1900, took a strong anti-Amendment stand: "We warn the white people that this amendment will disfranchise approximately as many white men as it will Negroes in this state, and will leave the Negro still a factor in politics, with as much power as he now has. . . . This is a white man's government and always will be; there are two white voters to every colored voter, hence the state is in no danger of Negro supremacy. And since our Supreme Court has decided that the Legislature may pass such laws for each county as is necessary for its government,²⁸ no Eastern county need fear Negro

²⁶ *Asheville Citizen*, Oct. 15, 1899.

²⁷ *The Caucasian*, Jan. 4, 1900.

²⁸ *Harris vs. Wright* (North Carolina Supreme Court Reports, CXXI, 172).

rule. . . . This amendment if adopted would end popular government in this state. It would turn the offices over to a select few, who would not feel bound to respect the rights of the common man, because the common man would not be able to enforce respect at the ballot box."²⁹

To these arguments against the Amendment, the Democrats replied vigorously. As to its constitutionality, Chairman Simmons asserted that the Amendment in no way denied or abridged the right of any man to vote; it simply established a suffrage qualification. If a Negro could read and write or could prove that he was a voter in any state in 1867, or was a descendant of such a voter, there was nothing in the Amendment to prevent his voting. In justification of the "Grandfather Clause," Simmons pointed out that if one had exercised in the past the right to vote or had been in family association with such a voter, he was presumed to have the necessary qualifications for voting.³⁰

In support of the proposal to disfranchise the illiterate Negroes, lurid word pictures were painted of conditions in the "Black Belt" under the Fusionists. The *Democratic Hand-Book of 1900* informed its readers that "whole communities felt that they were standing, as it were, upon a smoldering volcano which might break forth at any time."³¹ No hesitancy was felt in appealing to race feeling. It was asserted, for instance, that the two races could live together "in peace and prosperity only when the stronger race governs and the weaker race acquiesces." Any other course would produce conflict and "conflict means danger to the weaker race."³²

The Republicans insisted that the Democratic cry of "Negro domination" was simply a smoke screen behind which the Democratic party was seeking to fortify its control of the state government. Democratic promises to "purify politics" were scoffed at. The Republican platform asserted: "In spite of the official records, which show that there has been no Negro domination in the state or in any of its counties during the past quarter century, the Democratic leaders have determined to wage the coming election upon the race issue alone."³³

A clarification of the meaning of Negro domination seemed

²⁹ *News and Observer*, Jan. 19, 1900.

³⁰ *Asheville Citizen*, Feb. 1, 1900.

³¹ [*North Carolina*] *Democratic Hand-Book*, 1900, p. 10.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³³ *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia* (1900), N. S., XXV, 44-45.

necessary, and the Democrats responded to the challenge. Said William W. Kitchin: "What is Negro domination? Ask the taxpayers who have felt its evils. . . . Go to New Hanover and ask its chamber of commerce whose business was paralyzed. Ask the ladies who for months dared not alone walk the streets of Wilmington at midday. . . . When the great controlling element is the Negro vote, and when that vote and its influences name the officials and dictate the policy of a town, city, or county, then it is dominant."³⁴

Early in the campaign, Jeter C. Pritchard, North Carolina's Republican Senator, sought to secure the passage of a Senate resolution declaring the North Carolina Suffrage Amendment to be unconstitutional. There was no North Carolina Democrat in the Senate to fight the Pritchard resolution, but other Southern Democrats responded to the challenge. Senators H. D. Money, of Mississippi; Samuel D. McEnery, of Louisiana; and John T. Morgan, of Alabama, spoke at length against a condemnation of the North Carolina Amendment. Senator Pritchard was not able to muster sufficient support to secure the passage of his resolution. Even Northern Republicans showed no great zeal to protect the suffrage rights of the North Carolina Negroes.³⁵

Meanwhile, the Democrats in North Carolina were busy organizing "White Supremacy" clubs and in other ways waging a vigorous campaign for the adoption of the Amendment by the state electorate in August. The Executive Committee published in June the *Amendment Catechism*, which in the simplest language raised and answered questions concerning the Amendment. Typical questions and answers are these:

Question: Will the Amendment, if adopted, disfranchise the Negro?

Answer: The chief object of the Amendment is to eliminate the ignorant and irresponsible Negro vote. . . .

Question: Will the Amendment disfranchise the uneducated white man?

Answer: Why certainly not. The object of the Grandfather Clause is to protect forever the entire body of the uneducated white vote of the state in their right to vote. . . .³⁶

³⁴ *The North Carolina Suffrage Amendment: Speech of Hon. William W. Kitchin, of North Carolina, in the House of Representatives, Thursday, May 3, 1900* (n. p., n. d., in North Carolina Pamphlets, Vol. IV, Occasional Addresses, University of North Carolina Library), p. 3.

³⁵ *Congressional Record*, XXXIII, Part I, p. 670; Part II, pp. 1037 ff.

³⁶ *Amendment Catechism* (Raleigh, 1900), pp. 1-2.

Democratic orators, too numerous to name, spread the gospel of "White Supremacy" from "Cherokee to Currituck." Especially outstanding in this respect, however, was the work of Charles B. Aycock, Democratic nominee for governor. Aycock, possessed of a fine physique, a keen mind, and an unusual persuasiveness, did much toward winning the support of the masses for the Amendment. He coupled the demand for suffrage reform with an appeal for adequate public education in the state. In a speech at Shelby on May 1, Aycock pledged the Democratic party to "the education of every illiterate white child in North Carolina."³⁷ Significantly, little was said about Negro education.

The Fusionists, too, had able campaign speakers. Senators Butler and Pritchard were quite active in the central and western counties where they repeatedly warned the illiterate whites of the danger of disfranchisement which the Amendment held for them in the event that the "Grandfather Clause" was not sustained by the courts. In the hope of reaching larger audiences, Butler suggested that a series of debates be held in various parts of the state between the rival candidates. But Chairman Simmons declined for the Democrats on the grounds that he did not wish to divert attention from the Amendment by injecting personalities into the campaign. Whereupon, Butler accused him of being afraid to let the people hear both sides of the question,³⁸ and the Fusion press made frequent references to "White Feather" Simmons. The ridicule of the opposition even took the form of verse:

Alas for poor old Simmons
His every trick and scheme
Will vanish from his vision
Like some nocturnal dream.

At the proposed amendment
We'll fire our biggest gun;
Vote for equal rights for all
And special rights to none.³⁹

As the campaign progressed, it became increasingly clear that the "White Supremacy" issue was cutting across party lines. Many

³⁷ *News and Observer*, May 2, 1900.

³⁸ *Some Correspondence Between the North Carolina Chairmen of Two Political Organizations* (n. p., n. d., pamphlet in Duke University Library), pp. 1-4.

³⁹ A. Kenneth Parker in *The Caucasian*, May 10, 1900.

individual Populists were openly championing the Suffrage Amendment, while some western Democrats, alarmed over the possibility of disfranchisement, were fighting the Amendment. Each party made a desperate effort to hold its own membership as well as to encourage desertion from the opposition camp. The Populists recommended a ban on Negro office-holding in lieu of Negro disfranchisement, and the Democrats looked anxiously to the legislature to make some last-minute changes in the Amendment which would render it more acceptable to the white voters of the western counties.

The legislature met in adjourned session in June, 1900, and inserted an additional clause in the Suffrage Amendment to the effect that all parts of the Amendment should stand or fall together.⁴⁰ Also, some of the most criticized features of the election law of 1899—"Simmons Ballot Box Regulator"—were eliminated. Among these was the requirement that one seeking to register must, on the request of the registrar, prove his identity by the testimony of two witnesses.⁴¹

Angry threats and a few cases of violence characterized the last days of the campaign. Several Democratic registrars were forced at the point of a gun to register Negroes, while a Republican named Teague was driven out of Smithfield and Selma for attempting to arouse the Negroes. John D. Bellamy, of Wilmington, Representative from the Sixth Congressional District, made a public assertion that Senator Butler ought to be run out of the state. Butler retorted by inviting him to come to Raleigh and begin the "expelling business" at once or else "have the decency to keep your mouth shut."⁴²

Despite these ominous signs, the day of election, August 2, passed quietly and with results most gratifying to the Democrats. The Suffrage Amendment was carried by a majority of 53,932 votes. Likewise, Charles B. Aycock received 186,650 votes to 126,296 for Spencer B. Adams, his Fusionist opponent for the governorship.⁴³

The Democratic press was jubilant. Said the *Charlotte Daily Observer* editorially: "In all, Thursday was one of the greatest days that ever dawned upon North Carolina. . . . We are to have safe, honest, and economical government; we are to be an educated

⁴⁰ *Public Laws of North Carolina, Adjourned Session, 1900*, I, 23-54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *News and Observer*, July 7 and 15, 1900; *Charlotte Daily Observer*, Aug. 12, 1900.

⁴³ R. D. W. Connor (ed.), *A Manual of North Carolina, 1913*, pp. 1006, 1018.

people; we are to be a free people, saying and writing what we think for the first time in forty years."⁴⁴

The Fusionists, on the other hand, cried aloud that they had been cheated at the polls in this election dedicated to the purity of the ballot. A correspondent from Beaufort County wrote to *The Caucasian*: "The agents and appointees of the Democratic party stole everything in sight on the 2nd, election day. They refused to register in the county 400 who were entitled to register; they intimidated 250, who, after registering, scratched their names off the books. They made the voters in many places put their ballots in the box, and in other precincts they put the tickets in the wrong box purposely and in the count threw them out. The vote cast, if counted correctly, would have defeated them in this county."⁴⁵

Despite Democratic denials, the returning of large majorities for the "Disfranchising Amendment" from counties with a predominantly Negro population, such as New Hanover, Halifax, and Warren, points to irregularity in the conduct of the election. Many Democratic poll holders have since admitted the use of intimidation and trickery, including ballot boxes with false bottoms, in the election of 1900.

It is also true that the excitement of the campaign brought out a very large white vote, probably enough to have insured the passage of the Amendment even if the returns from a few "Black" counties had been reversed.

The passage of the Suffrage Amendment attracted considerable attention outside the state. In an editorial entitled "The North Carolina Election," *The Outlook* said: "It is perfectly legitimate for a community to confine the suffrage to those who can read and write; it is not legitimate to give the suffrage to ignorant whites and deny it to educated blacks. . . . And what is worse than the provision itself is the violation throughout the state of the right of free discussion and the right to free suffrage in this election. Physical terror was employed to prevent Negroes from voting; social terror to prevent white men from voting."⁴⁶

But despite *The Outlook* and the Fifteenth Amendment, North Carolina had "solved" the problem of the Negro in politics in her own way. In addition to the crystallization of public sentiment

⁴⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 3, 1900.

⁴⁵ *The Caucasian*, Aug. 9, 1900.

⁴⁶ *The Outlook*, LXV, 841-843 (Aug. 11, 1900).

against Negro suffrage, the "White Supremacy" campaign resulted in the incorporation of educational tests in the state Constitution which could be used to disfranchise the great mass of Negroes if they should attempt to vote. Actually, the educational requirement proved more useful as a threat than as an active deterrent to Negro voting. Most Negroes, preferring amicable relations with their white neighbors and employers to the less tangible blessings of the ballot, stayed away from the polls.

CHAPTER V

THE AFTERMATH OF DISFRANCHISEMENT: NEGRO DEMOCRATS

The adoption of the Suffrage Amendment in 1900 was regarded as a "final" solution of the question of the Negro in North Carolina politics. A literacy requirement for voting was now written into the state Constitution, and 47.6 per cent of the Negroes were illiterate. True enough, 19.5 per cent of the native whites and 6.1 per cent of the foreign-born whites in the state were likewise illiterate, but their suffrage rights were protected by the "Grandfather Clause."¹ The fact that the whites constituted 67 per cent of the total population doubly insured a continuation of white supremacy.²

Ostensibly, the new suffrage qualifications would be used to eliminate only illiterate Negroes from the electorate. But following the passionate campaigns of 1898 and 1900, no one, least of all the Negroes, had any illusions about what was to happen to the suffrage rights of the entire race. The rank and file of the white Democrats, having read in the party handbook of 1900 that the Negro "is on a different plane intellectually and morally from the white man,"³ were not apt to encourage Negroes who could read and write to vote.

This situation occasioned regret on the part of a few of the more conscientious Democratic leaders. Henry G. Connor wrote in 1902: "I have been very much surprised at the very small number of Negroes who have registered. I fear that the shrinkage in the number will make the Negro absolutely indifferent to his political interests and welfare and the whites will be emboldened to oppress him in his material and educational interests. It is a serious question whether 100,000 freemen can maintain any satisfactory status in North Carolina without any political power or influence."⁴

It would be a gross exaggeration to say that the Democratic leadership generally felt any great concern over the political plight

¹ United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915* (Washington, 1918), p. 428.

² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³ [North Carolina] *Democratic Hand-Book*, 1900, p. 35.

⁴ Henry G. Connor to George Howard, Nov. 3, 1902.

of the Negroes. Rather, they were confident in their own strength and certain that they had found the solution to a difficult question. Said the *Democratic Hand-Book*, 1904: "The Democratic party points with pride to its settlement of the race problem in North Carolina—a settlement that depends upon Democratic supremacy for its permanence. The Constitutional Amendment furnishes all the people of the State safeguards of peace and order, of life, liberty, and happiness, and guarantees educational, religious and social progress as well as industrial prosperity and development."⁵

Allowing for understandable exaggeration, one must admit that conditions in the state did show improvement after the Democratic triumph of 1900. The new Democracy was considerably more progressive than the post-Reconstruction Bourbon Democracy. "Chastened by the Populists for its Bourbon transgressions, assigned a penance of fasting while its opponents divided the pie, it had come to the mourners' bench determined to get right."⁶ Under the leadership of Governor Charles B. Aycock, the state experienced an educational renaissance. Negro schools were not improved as much as white schools, but an illiberal proposal to divide the school fund between the races in accordance with taxes paid by each was voted down in the legislature. During the same session, that of 1903, the legislature passed a statute prohibiting the labor of children under the age of twelve and fixing a maximum sixty-six-hour week for persons under eighteen years of age. Local option laws, satisfactory to the prohibition forces, were likewise enacted.

These developments in North Carolina called forth from *The Outlook* the following comment: "The satisfactory record of this Legislature representing one race does not prove that the disfranchisement of the Negro will in the end result in the better political education of the whole people of the State or the broader humanity of its laws. . . . Nevertheless, the immediate effects of the restriction of the suffrage are to be considered, and the record of the recent Legislature in North Carolina seems to be highly creditable to the experiment of restricted suffrage now on trial."⁷

While the Democrats were responsible for the disfranchisement of the Negroes, there was no real effort on the part of other political

⁵ [*North Carolina*] *Democratic Hand-Book*, 1904, pp. 3-4.

⁶ Alex Mathews Arnett, *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies*, p. 24.

⁷ *The Outlook*, LXXIII, 847 (April 11, 1903).

groups in the state to revive the issue after 1900. In fact, there is ample evidence that prominent Populists and Republicans were quite willing to abandon the sinking ship before the final plunge. W. E. Fountain, of Tarboro, wrote a "strictly confidential" letter to Marion Butler in August, 1898, suggesting that the Populists force the disfranchisement of the Negro "as Tilghman [Tillman] has done in South Carolina" in order to prevent conservative Democrats from using him as a bugbear any longer.⁸

Republican Governor Daniel L. Russell, too, saw the handwriting on the wall. In the midst of the campaign of 1900 he wrote, but apparently did not give public expression to, the following sentiment: "Republicanism in the South since reconstruction has been weakest in those sections where the colored people were numerically the strongest and it has been and is strongest where the population is substantially all white. The strongholds of Republicanism in the South are in Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina, in West Virginia and in Eastern Kentucky. . . . In North Carolina, the Democratic politicians are seeking by a proposed Suffrage Amendment to our Constitution to nullify the Federal Constitution, after the manner of Louisiana. . . . The colored people will see that their safety requires them to follow the men who give them employment. The colored tenant, if he votes at all, will vote with the owner of the land. The bugbear of Negro supremacy being removed, the men of thought, of wealth, of enterprise and of action will take charge of the Republican party. In a few years under these conditions, the Republican party of North Carolina will be the party of property and intelligence."⁹

After 1900 the Populist party rapidly faded out as a political force in North Carolina. Most of the Populists returned to the Democratic party; some, like Marion Butler, joined the Republicans. The Republicans, realizing that in a "white man's country" Negro support was more apt to be a liability than an asset, became "Lily White." In 1906 the Republican organization publicly repudiated the Negroes. The *Hand-Book* of that year stated: "Of the 97 counties of the State, all those having the smallest proportion of Negro population are either decidedly Republican in sentiment, or contest for county supremacy with their Democratic neighbors upon

⁸ W. E. Fountain to Marion Butler, Aug. 9, 1898.

⁹ "Republicanism in the South" (typewritten MS in Daniel L. Russell Papers).

something like an equal footing. The most progressive parts of the State show the greatest Republican increase."¹⁰

The results of the decision to turn "Lily White" were somewhat disappointing to the Republicans. The general character of the party in North Carolina since 1900 has probably been higher than prior to that date, but the expected division of the whites on the tariff and other such issues did not take place. There have been no important Republican victories in North Carolina since the turn of the century, with the exception of the triumph for Hoover in 1928. That cannot be accounted for on the basis of the local situation, but simply because of the fact that the majority of North Carolinians did not care to see a "wet" Roman Catholic from New York's East Side in the White House. *The Negro Year Book* in 1912 noted with evident satisfaction: "In North Carolina, the Lily White faction of the Republican party is said to have made a miserable and disappointing show in the state election."¹¹

The Democrats were slow to abandon the scarecrow of the Negro in politics. Shades of Reconstruction and the Fusion regime were called up every election year, and the "blight of Republicanism" was given a thorough going over. As late as 1916, the Democratic Executive Committee was reaffirming "confidence in the wisdom and justice of the suffrage amendment to our State Constitution. Under its influence we have had freedom from race issues, and both races have enjoyed contentment and prosperity. The hazard to its valid continuance makes it imperative for the public good that Democratic supremacy in the State be maintained."¹²

What had actually happened to the Negro vote after 1900? Evidence points to the fact that it very nearly disappeared for a time. A correspondent wrote to Senator Furnifold M. Simmons from eastern Carolina in 1906: "The Republicans are not a circumstance in this section as they are so few now since the 'nigger' is out of it."¹³

Yet, such generalizations do not tell the whole story. Some Negroes who were entitled to vote under the terms of the law did register and vote. In Warrenton Township, Warren County,

¹⁰ *Republican Hand-Book of North Carolina* (Greensboro, 1906), p. 1.

¹¹ Monroe N. Work (ed.), *The Negro Year Book*, 1912 (Tuskegee Institute, Ala., 1912), p. 31.

¹² [*North Carolina*] *Democratic Hand-Book*, 1916, p. 7.

¹³ N. R. Corey to Furnifold M. Simmons, March 26, 1906 (Furnifold M. Simmons Papers, Duke University Library).

twelve Negroes registered as voters in 1902.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, other counties with large numbers of Negroes continued, year in and year out, to have a few Negro voters. They met with no real obstacles, because they were too few in number to have any decisive influence on elections. Some Negroes apparently took the Amendment at face value and believed it to be an incentive to education. A Negro teacher, Governor Ellis Harris, published in Raleigh, in 1903, *The North Carolina Constitutional Reader* "so that the unlearned man may commence with the alphabet and learn step by step to spell, to read and write any section of the State Constitution."¹⁵

Gradually the structure of disfranchisement, erected in 1900, gave way. The final date for registration under the "Grandfather Clause" was 1908. After that year, according to law, whites as well as Negroes might be required to prove their literacy before registering. In 1915 the United States Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the Oklahoma "Grandfather Clause"—a clause somewhat similar to Section Five of the North Carolina Amendment.¹⁶ The court decision in no way affected North Carolina, but the whole system of providing illiterate whites with a loophole was dealt a severe blow. Still another obstacle was removed when the North Carolina poll tax prerequisite for voting was repealed in 1920.

The Democratic "white primary," which has been an effective weapon of disfranchisement in Texas and certain other Southern states, has not been used on a state-wide scale at any time in North Carolina. Only a few of the city and county Democratic organizations have, from time to time, adopted rules barring Negroes from participation in the primaries.¹⁷ Exclusion from the Democratic primary was, of course, practically tantamount to disfranchisement since most of the real contests were decided there rather than in the general election.

A very important factor in considering the potential effectiveness of the Suffrage Amendment as a means of disfranchisement is the changing rate of illiteracy. The percentage of illiteracy among North Carolina Negroes has dropped steadily since 1900. The

¹⁴ Warren County, Registration Books, Courthouse, Warrenton, N. C.

¹⁵ Rupert B. Vance, "Aycock of North Carolina," *Southwest Review*, XVIII, 299 (Spring, 1933).

¹⁶ *Guinn and Beal vs. United States* (United States Supreme Court Reports, CCXXXVIII, 347).

¹⁷ Paul Lewinson, *Race, Class, and Party* (London, New York, Toronto, 1932), p. 153.

figures by decades are as follows: 1900—47.6 per cent, 1910—31.9 per cent, 1920—24.5 per cent, 1930—20.6 per cent. The percentage of illiteracy among Negroes of voting age is still considerably higher than among the whites, but public education is closing the gap. Adult illiteracy statistics for 1930 show: Negroes—27.7 per cent, native whites (native parents)—7.5 per cent, native whites (foreign or mixed parentage)—1.5 per cent, foreign-born whites—5.3 per cent.¹⁸

The gradual removal of barriers both of law and of opinion has encouraged a greater participation of the Negro in politics. This is true not only in North Carolina, but, in varying degrees, throughout the South. It is especially true in the urban centers. On the basis of a reliable survey, it was ascertained that during the decade of the 1920's, Durham, with an adult literate Negro population of 3,105, had from 500 to 700 voters; Greensboro, with 2,678 eligible Negroes, had approximately the same number of voters; and Raleigh, with 3,897 potential Negro voters, had 582 actual voters.¹⁹ Each of these cities is a center of wealth and higher education among the Negroes, and it is reasonable to suppose that more Negroes voted there than in other towns and rural districts of the state. It is evident on all sides that the Negroes have been more active politically during the 1930's than during the previous decade. The Negro registration for the municipal primary in Durham in April, 1933, totaled more than one thousand persons.²⁰ A League of Independent Voters, headed by a Negro, T. D. Parham, had been organized earlier in the spring and was active in this election promoting "an interest among Negroes in exercising their rights as citizens to vote." No attempt was made to dictate the choice of candidates.²¹

Less political interest and certainly less organized political activity among the Negroes are to be found in the rural sections. Warren County, with a population 63.5 per cent Negro in 1930, may be taken as typical of the rural "Black" counties. An examination of the registration books, made in July, 1939, revealed that in Warrenton Township (including Warrenton, the county seat)

¹⁸ United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915*, p. 428; United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1935* (Washington, 1935), pp. 242-243.

¹⁹ Lewinson, *Race, Class, and Party*, p. 219.

²⁰ *Durham* (N. C.) *Morning Herald*, April 12, 1933.

²¹ *Ibid.*

110 Negroes and 1,270 whites were registered as voters.²² The ratio of Negroes registered to the number technically eligible to vote is, thus, still small. Comparatively few Negro families in Warren County exhibit an interest in politics. Most of those who do have been voting for years, and as additional members of the family become of age they, too, are registered. For instance, five Ransoms, seven Greens, and seven Thorntons are registered as voters in Warrenton Township.²³ Mansfield Thornton served as register of deeds of Warren County during the period of Fusion control and has continued to vote ever since.

In spite of the fact that the Republican party had traditionally been regarded as the party to which the Negro owed his allegiance since Reconstruction, the national Democratic organization made bids from time to time for Negro support. This policy gradually bore fruit. A National Negro Democratic Convention was held in Indianapolis, Indiana, on May 17, 1911, and issued a rather significant address: "We, the Negroes in National Democratic Convention assembled . . . desire to appeal to the colored voters of the United States, to open their eyes to the conditions surrounding us as a race, and suggest that it is wisdom's way that the Negro should no longer blindly follow any one party to his own harm and detriment, as he has heretofore followed the Republican party. We believe that the American Negro should divide his vote the same as the white man, and be found in all political parties for precisely the same reason that the white men are found in all parties."²⁴

The drift of Negroes toward the Democratic party during the 1920's and 1930's has been quite perceptible. In 1924 there was set up a Negro Division of the Democratic National Committee which sent out special literature for Negro voters. Such a division was organized again in 1928, 1932, and 1936. North Carolina was represented on the committee in 1932 by Dr. F. C. Williston.²⁵ Both Alfred E. Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt attracted a large Negro vote. The New Deal, with its social work and relief features, has been especially popular with the Negroes. In addition, the President and Mrs. Roosevelt have on numerous occasions spon-

²² Warren County, Registration Books, 1939.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Monroe N. Work (ed.), *Negro Year Book and Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro*, 1912, p. 30.

²⁵ Monroe N. Work (ed.), *Negro Year Book . . .*, 1937-38, pp. 101-102.

sored Negro artists and in other ways sought to cultivate the good will of the Negro race.

In North Carolina, the Democratic party was rapidly becoming no longer strictly a "white man's party." In 1930 Raleigh had 375 Negroes registered as Democrats, 45 as Republicans, and 2 as Independents. These Negro Democrats participated actively in the senatorial primary between Furnifold M. Simmons and Josiah W. Bailey.²⁶ This development called forth from the *News and Observer*, which had fought so ardently for Negro disfranchisement in 1900, the following comment: "There was no excuse, reason, or justification for the introduction of the Negro into the primary contests this year. With few exceptions the Negro is not responsible."²⁷

Durham, with 18,717 Negroes²⁸ in a total population of 52,037 (1930 Census) and with a number of Negro educators and industrialists to lead their race, inevitably became a focal point in the revival of political activity. There, as in Raleigh, Negro Democrats appeared in increasing numbers. A district convention of Negro Democrats which attracted delegates from Orange, Caswell, Alamance, Granville, Guilford, Person, and Durham counties met in the Durham County Courthouse on May 28, 1938. All candidates for office in the Sixth Congressional, Tenth Judicial, and Sixteenth Senatorial Districts were invited to be present. Among the whites who attended the convention were Oscar Barker, Edney Ridge, and Barney P. Jones, candidates for Congress. No endorsements were made; the candidates were simply presented to the convention. James T. Taylor, dean of men at the North Carolina College for Negroes, was elected to preside. In his keynote address, Taylor declared the Negro had deserted the Republican party because it "was at sea and heading the country toward ruin and disaster." This very meeting, he said, was "a testimony to the good sense of the Negro race as well as to the inherent fairness, the growing liberalism and increasing understanding of the Southern white man." Before adjournment, another similar meeting was called for the spring of 1940. Thus an effective organization of Negro Democrats seems to have been formed.²⁹

With the increase in Negro voting has come a limited amount

²⁶ Monroe N. Work (ed.), *Negro Year Book . . .*, 1931-32, p. 106.

²⁷ *News and Observer*, June 2, 1930.

²⁸ United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States*, 1920-32, p. 239.

²⁹ (Durham) *Sunday Herald-Sun*, May 29, 1938.

of Negro office-holding. For instance, L. A. Austin and F. K. Watkins, Negro Democrats, were elected justices of the peace in 1932 in Durham. Henry High was chosen to fill a similar position in Raleigh.⁸⁰ Names of Negro candidates are coming more and more to be found on the Democratic primary ballots. Thus far, few have been elected except to minor offices.

What does the future hold for the Negro's political participation in North Carolina? That is a difficult question to answer. The trend seems to be toward a peaceful penetration by the Negro into the Democratic party. From the Negro's standpoint there is wisdom in this. As long as North Carolina remains virtually a one-party state, only in the Democratic primaries can he make his influence felt. Furthermore, as long as he supports the Democratic candidates the party organization is not apt to oppose the Negro's use of the ballot. The danger lies in the possibility of a factional fight within the Democratic party in the course of which one side might appeal indiscriminately to the Negro vote, thus restoring to the Negro the balance of power which he held in the 1890's. Such a large scale entrance of the Negroes into the political arena would probably revive the old race hatreds and might precipitate another drive for Negro disfranchisement. Despite the apparent liberalism exhibited by the present Democratic leadership toward the comparatively few Negroes who have knocked at the portals of the party, the determination to keep North Carolina a "white man's state" is as firm as it ever was. In addressing a convention of North Carolina Young Democratic Clubs in Durham on September 10, 1938, Senator Josiah W. Bailey asserted: "We will always have a white man's party in the South." Continuing with a condemnation of Federal government interference in the problems of the South, Bailey shouted: "We are determined to throw out the professional uplifters and political missionaries who come down to teach us the more abundant life at so much per day of the federal money."⁸¹ The applause seemed evidence that a good many young Democrats of North Carolina felt the same way.

⁸⁰ Monroe N. Work (ed.), *Negro Year Book . . .*, 1937-38, p. 97.

⁸¹ (Durham) *Sunday Herald-Sun*, Sept. 11, 1938.

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the story of the Negro in North Carolina politics is apt to leave one with mixed emotions. There are undeniable elements of tragedy in the whole life of the Negro in America. He was sold into bondage against his will and freed by a people who did not understand him. The ballot was given to him at a time when he was not prepared to use it, yet had it not been given to him then it is doubtful whether he would ever have got it. That he misused his political privileges is probably true, but the virtual disfranchisement of the Negro race about 1900 came not primarily because he was a bad citizen but because he was associated with the political party to which the majority of whites did not belong. The politicians of the Democratic party unquestionably exploited race consciousness for their own profit.

To charge the "disfranchisers" of 1898 and 1900 with utter unscrupulousness and insincerity would, however, be unjust. There were men in the Democratic party who were quite conscientious in believing that the welfare of the state demanded the disfranchisement of the Negroes, or at least the great majority of them. Political morality had sunk to a low level during the period when the Populist movement had split the white vote and the Negroes had held the balance of power. The cause of the political corruption must be removed, they felt, and it was the Negro who had to make the sacrifice. The Negro's feelings in the matter were given scant consideration by the Democratic reformers.

The technicalities of the Democratic election laws and the Suffrage Amendment of 1900 were not nearly so important in cutting down the Negro vote as the crystallization of sentiment in the state against the Negro's political activity. The harsh words and the sporadic violence of 1898 and 1900 were not soon forgotten by the whites or by the blacks. Practical considerations dictated that the great mass of Negroes become politically inactive.

How great a sacrifice did this entail on the Negro's part? To the Negro politician it meant giving up a career. To those Negro leaders who were interested in the advancement of the race, virtual disfranchisement came as a distinct disappointment and rebuff. They felt, with reason, that one could scarcely expect the Negroes to become good citizens when they had no hope of participating in affairs

of government. To the average Negro in the factory or the cotton field disfranchisement was no great privation. He little understood or cared about political issues. Candidates to him were mostly names of white men he did not know. He might miss a little flattery and perhaps a drink on election day, but that was about all. In that respect the uneducated, underprivileged Negro was not vastly different from the average white man in the same economic situation.

The lot of the Negro in North Carolina is not necessarily worse than if a higher percentage of Negroes voted. In the Old South there was an intangible yet real sense of *noblesse oblige* on the part of the planter class toward "inferiors." That sense has not been entirely lost. In a material way, the Negro has fared quite as well under Democratic rule since 1900 as under Populist-Republican rule during the 1890's, if not a little better. Certainly, his educational system is better. White man's government is not synonymous with bad government for the Negro. But to the Negro, also, it is not self-government. And that may well be important. The recent re-entrance of the Negro into politics via the Democratic party does not extend much farther than the upper brackets of the Negroes. It does not affect the masses.

One primary reason for the disfranchisement of the Negro at the turn of the century was the fact that he supported the "wrong" party. The party which he backed was defeated and, in turn, virtually renounced him. Now he supports the "right" party. Will this fact insure his continued use of the ballot? The future is by no means certain; much depends on the vagaries of politics.

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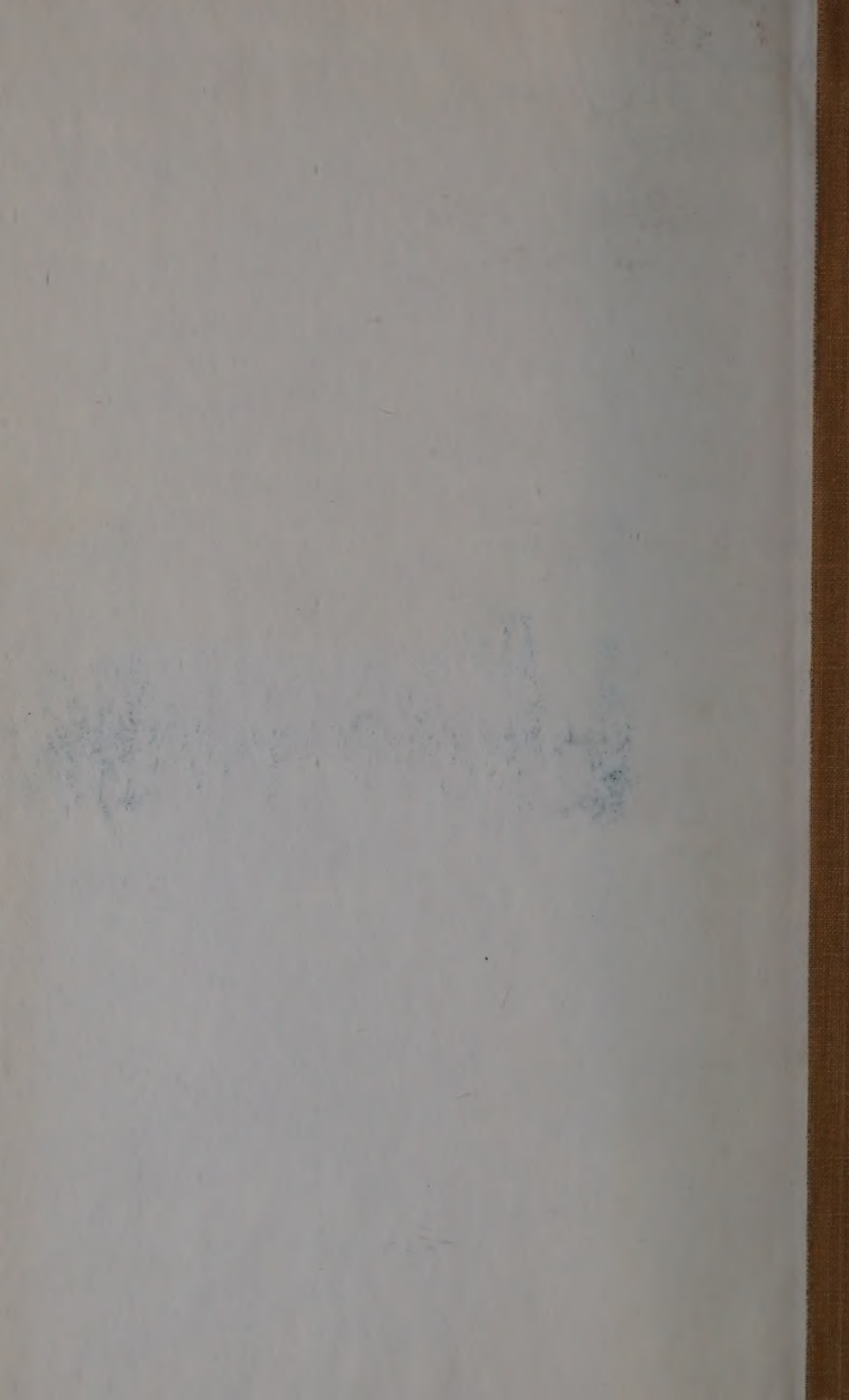
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